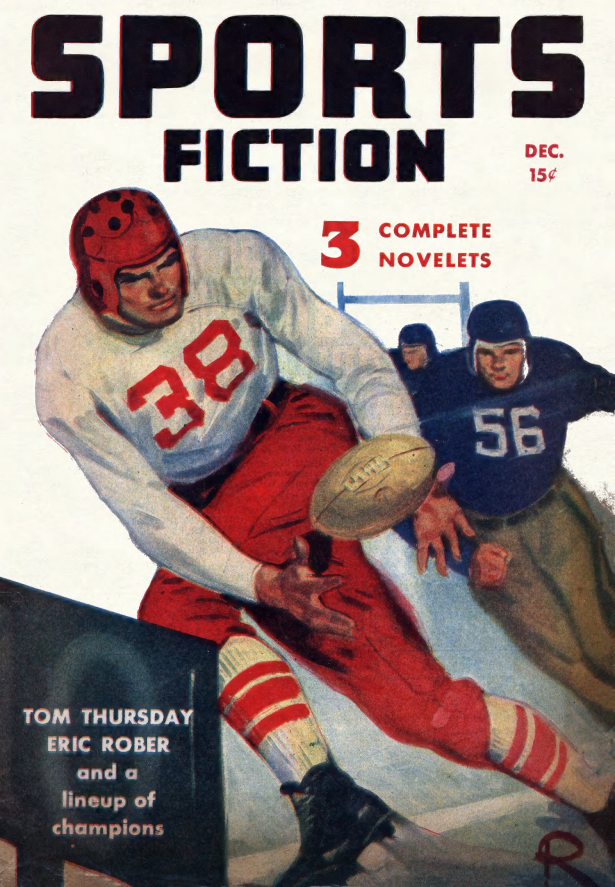


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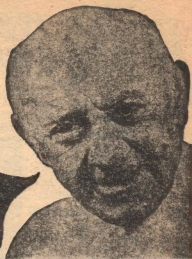
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From Sideline To Goal Line

A Powerhouse Football Novelet

By Eric Rober

Hig Barron's tongue was a lash upon the weary Kenton team and now and then it would spur them into a spurt of spirit, but it never lasted. Then Coach Gilson arranged to have Hig become a member of the team, in spite of Barron's reluctance to play the game he loved. But what can be done with eleven men when ten of them don't believe in themselves?



1

A GAIN THE big Kenton grid machine had bored deep into enemy territory. But twice before that afternoon an inspired Crake team had halted them just yards from pay dirt. Now, Red Enghott, quarterback in the Kenton T, wheeled, faked, fed it to Feet Penrusk, the left wing. An end-around; for a moment it looked as if it would click. But sloppy blocking failed to take out a Crake end completely. He trailed the galloping Feet to drop him after only a three-yard gain.

"Don't those guys care about winning?" growled Pat Fusco, backfield aide, from the bench. "They got lead

in their pants and mush in their guts! And no inspiration, damn 'em!"

Beside him, Whisper Gilson nodded. "Football is something more than mere mechanical ability, Pat. It's spirit. And they're short on it!"

Down the line, Head Cheerleader Hig Barron launched the crowd into an impassioned, "We want a touch-down" chant. He had them swaying in unison, had them begging, shrieking like fanatics in their emotion.

Enghott faked a pass from inside the thirty, then shovelled to Jumbo Jaslinsky. The powerhouse plunger ripped through on the inside, bounced down a backer-up. He picked up twelve, elephantine shoulders a battering ram. And then the crowd's roar turned into a mass sob of disappointment, for it was a heart-breaker with the final minutes ebb-

ing and Kenton trailin at 27-21. Subs on the bench sat with wrenching faces. You could see the team slump; a desperate Crake tackler had stolen the ball from Jumbo as they went down.

The cheerleader, Barron, pranced around swearing. "Can't anything make those guys mad? Can't they get hot—and mad, ever?" Then he was racing down before the stands to the sector opposite the end of the field where the two teams were. He brandished his big, gilt-hued megaphone; Barron was a flat-bodied dynamic chap, radiating energy. He waved clenched hands at the depressed rooters, strident voice spiking the stillness.

"All right, all right! Back them up," he told them. "It's your game, too, now! We're going to fight alongside them. Ready?" His long arms pendulumed as they tensed forward. There was something hypnotic about him. His blonde head jerked. And the rhythmic fierce chant roared from the crowd.

"Fight, Wildcats, fight! Fight, Wildcats, fight!..." Like combers booming on a beach, it rolled out onto the autumn-browned turf. "Fight, Wildcats, fight!"

A Crake sweep was smashed back by fierce Kenton tackling. A spinner lost two. But then an offside plus a daring flat pass over the center gave Crake a first down. Over on the bench, the cadaverous Gilson pulled at his hat angrily.

"They're psychologically on their heels! Won't they ever wake up?"

"They could be a tough team. Won't they ever wake up?" grunted Hig Barron to himself, keeping that "Fight" yell going. He grimaced at the students for more volume, more enthusiasm. The roar swelled. Barron gyrated, apparently tireless, electric with energy.

The heads of players on the field swivelled toward the source of that yelling. And, as if it were contagious, Kenton roused itself from its lethargy. Little Joe Scanlon, the center

roving on defense, smashed up a tackle drive. Then Feet Penrusk half blocked a Crake punt. Enghott raced it back to the thirty five. Big Jasinski buck-battered down to the twenty-three. But again Kenton was black-jacked by the breaks when an offside called them back.

"That does it. Too late now," said Gilson on the bench.

"They always wait till too late," Fusco spat out. "If they worked half as hard as that guy, Barron, down there right through the game—" He nodded down toward the head cheerleader.

YELLOW-HAIRED Barron, with the big eyes that dominated his face, had shifted quickly up before that section of the stands where the penalized team now was. With a gesture, he silenced that segment of the crowd. His voice bit out at them.

"Listen, jerks," he needed, "I know you're all worn out from sitting on those hard seats. But try to make one more big effort, you Monday morning quarterbacks!" Sarcasm dripped from his big speaking cone. "But you—you're going to take them over that goal-line! See?" His arms swung to give them the cadence. He saw Enghott and his mates wheel from the huddle. "Now—now!" Barron barked. Sound, staccato as a machine gun, packing the power of cannon, smote the field.

"Go, Wildcats, go! Go, Wildcats, go!" It was a roared prayer, a stentorian command and a four-beat chant of confidence. "Go..."

Wright, blocking halfback, mopped his face wearily, glanced toward the stands. Then his head jerked up. Enghott beat his hands as he hopped to position in the T-formation but his shovel flip to Monk Stern going to the right was low. Stern made a miraculous snatch off his shoelaces, kept going. He stiff-armed a backer-up, made up the penalty, plus three more.

Hig Barron grinned a little, signed his cheering stooges into disciplined silence as Kenton huddled. But with

the snapback from center, that tide of sound as sharp as gunfire rolled across the field again. It seemed infectious as the team caught fire. They struck with authority, hard, savage. Spinners. A double reverse. A back-field fumble set them back. Enghott jump-passed over center for seven. Penrusk on a limping end-around and celing for a first down.

Tubby Ellers, the rotund line mentor leaped off the bench. "Damned if that Barron doesn't seem to have put a fire under them!" And the head coach, Whisper Gilson, glanced down to where the cheerleader toiled.

Barron had chucked away the megaphone. Had shed the gold sweater despite the chill rising wind as well. He moved along with the team, exhorting, jerking that chant from the crowd, demanding more and more. Kenton failed on two tries as desperate Crake dug in. Then Jaslinski bombed the center. And Monk Stern ripped to the outside and went over with two seconds to go.

That deadlocked it, 27-27. And twenty odd thousand spectators held their breaths as Cruhos, the giant tackle, came out of the line to try for the placement and the extra point. But the rising wind twisted the ball wide of the upright and the attempt failed. A tied game.

Over on the sideline, Hig Barron dropped to a knee and drummed a fist with the weariness of disappointment against the megaphone....

TALL GAUNT William "Whisper" Gilson stood in the doorway of his office and surveyed the dressing room. He'd never been the slave-driver type of coach, but right then he wondered if his technique had been wrong. A few of the team did look downcast, sitting around morosely. But there was a lot of easy chatter going on, laughing; Red Enghott and Stern and Feet Penrusk, after explaining it all with the phrase "bad breaks", were talking about their dates that night. Eddie Wright inspected a purpling bruise on his jaw in a wall mirror and grouched

about it because he was flying home for Sunday.

Gilson swore under his breath, wincing. He'd seen teams that had failed to win come in and sob, mad enough to chew the metal doors off the lockers. Seen them curse, heard individuals blaming themselves for every miscue in the game. But this gang....

Two-hundred-and-ten pound little Joe Scanlon and Tuck Cruhos, the half bald tackle, sauntered from the shower room. "They sure were lucky. And that Brandies at halfback was a tricky guy," Scanlon said.

"Uh huh," agreed the towering Tuck Cruhos. "Seen that new picture down at the Mosque yet? Tim Dunn told me it was great."

Gilson's hands balled into fists. He'd dealt out some tough tongue-lashings, but they didn't seem to take. Over by the rubbing table somebody remarked that Barron the cheerleader had almost knocked himself out.

Blackie Millard a second string end nodded as Gilson eaves-dropped. "Yeah. And he takes his football mighty seriously. I room across the hall from him in Randall. He's got a regular library on the game. Always diagramming and diagnosing plays, too."

"Grandstand quarterback, eh?"

"Guess so," Millard admitted. "Sundays he eats up the papers with their photos and play charts. Tomorrow he won't be talking to anybody because we didn't win. Friday he predicted we'd lose today if Crake once grabbed the lead."

WHISPER GILSON'S eyes narrowed thoughtfully as he turned into his office. Pat Fusco closed the door behind him. Gilson went to his desk and fingered the play-by-play charts of the contest idly, deep-sunken eyes almost closed. Tubby Ellers plucked his post-game cigar from his face. He smelled something coming. The head coach looked up and spoke in the perpetually husky voice that had earned him his nickname.

"Twice today we got back in that

ball game. Opening of the second half when we went sixty nine yards for a touchdown. And then there at the end when they scored with all the breaks going against them."

Both aides nodded. Gilson went on, eyes stabbing at them.

"And where was that Barron each time they went to town?"

Ellers, eyes puckered, got it first. "Say that's right. Yeah. Both times he was moving along the sideline with 'em—and setting the crowd on fire! And those were the times the team got hot. Yeah!"

"Yes, both times the team moved it," Fusco admitted.

Gilson nodded curtly. "Yep. That Barron's got something. Spirit. Call it what you will. But it's what our team lacks! Now—this sounds crazy. But, suppose—just suppose—Barron were on the field with them, as a player...."

MONDAY AFTERNOON, wondering what it was all about, Higby Barron dropped in at the fieldhouse. It was in response to the head coach's note. Whisper Gilson was on the phone when Barron entered his office. The coach nodded toward a chair, expelled cigaret smoke, and checked Barron's flat body, the wide but not deep shoulders. Then the oversized gray eyes that gave him the studious look. But there was a hint of objective coldness behind those eyes that hinted at a certain ruthless quality in him.

Gilson hung up, muttered something about football writers, then asked bluntly, "Barron, why did you predict we'd lose to Crake?" Although actually a tie, it had been a moral defeat for the Wildcats.

Hig Barron slouched easily in the chair. "Simple, Gilson. Kenton's strong—but smug. No fire. And Crake was overdue to pull me upset."

"Go ahead. Why?"

"Two weeks ago, they held big Western U. scoreless in the second half till the final five minutes. Last week, against Michigan Tech, they bowed—but in the third quarter they had a touchdown disallowed that

might have changed the tenor of the rest of the game. So they came in here fighting mad and hot to take it out on somebody. Your team was 'it'. Anything else you wanted to know, Gilson?"

Bridling inside at the insolence in Barron's tone, the head coach glanced down at a confidential report on Barron before him. It listed him as a junior of a hundred and sixty six pounds. High scholastic standing. Had attended Foxcroft Prep. No physical disability according to the university health chart. Took a daily gym workout. Gilson lifted the sunken eyes. "Ever play any football?"

Impatient to leave, Barron shrugged. "Played at it as a youngster. Backlot stuff. Kid teams. If you don't mind, I'm pretty busy and—"

Pat Fusco came in and said hello. "Seems to me I recall a high school back by the name of Barron four-five years ago. Any relation?"

Barron shook his head, mouth flattening. Gilson said, "So you think the team needs somebody to set them on fire, to ride 'em ragged."

The younger man's poise was maddening in its insolence. "I didn't say that. But that's about the score."

Whisper Gilson exploded his surprise bombshell casually in the thin husky voice. "How about taking over the job?" Despite his mild manner, Gilson was a gambler. If Crake could hold his machine, powerful outfits like Western U. and Mondson would run them groggy before they woke up. Something had to be done.

"You're crazy." Hig Barron stood up. "Anyway—nothing doing."

THEY WENT to work on him. Fusco said if he could handle himself at all on the field, he might be just the guy. Gilson said they'd just use him in the crucial moments. Use him like the china-doll quarter back of the old Haughton Harvard system. "We've watched you work that crowd up, Barron. Seen how you insult them, then get them to split their lungs. You wouldn't have to do

■ thing on the field except needle that gang of sawdust dummies! Why—"

Barron picked up his trenchcoat. "Save it. I—I don't care enough for the game." But pinpoints of perspiration shone on his brow.

Pat Fusco gave with the big crooked grin that could make a man boil. Reminded him of his diagraming and doping of the game. Barron lifted his eyebrows, drawled:

"Guess I just like to check on coaches' mistakes."

Gilson ignored the barb. "Just for one game, Baron! Try it. If that bunch once gets hot, they'll be all right."

Fusco made a nasty noise with his gum as Barron again said no. "Sure, things get pretty rough out on the field. But that glamor-pants job on the sidelines is safe. Huh?"

Hig Barron measured the back-field coach with a cold stare. "Fusco, do you coach for free? No, of course not. Well, in my case, it's the opposite. If I played, it would cost me money. I can't afford it."

His uncle had reared him since his parents had died during his boyhood, he went on to explain in that cool voice. A few years ago his brother, he said, had been seriously hurt in a high school game. Almost injured for life. After that, his uncle had forbidden them both to play again. Sworn to disinherit them if they did.

"My uncle owns the Barron Refrigerator Corporation. So I'd be pretty foolish. Besides, I feel I owe him something, Gilson. Don't you?"

The head coach nodded, about licked. Fusco shrugged and went to a window overlooking the field. Then Gilson caught that glint of objective coldness in Hig Barron's eyes and made one last stab. Something about this poised kid got him, made him think he could pull the stunt.

"Look, Barron. Let me call your uncle on the phone. Maybe for one game, he'd—"

Hig shook his head. "He flew to Europe two days ago."

Fusco looked over his shoulder. "Shucks, if he's in Europe, he

wouldn't have to hear about one game. Afterward, you could sorta explain it. Of course, if you were a *real* player and actually pulled something big on the field, it would be different. But if he heard about it months afterward—" He gave that irritating grin again.

And for some reason, he needed to say no more. Hig Barron paled slightly. But the only sign of the struggle boiling inside him was the quick knifing motion of his tongue along his lips. Watching, Gilson could catch the invisible but hot sparks of antipathy between those twb.

"All right, Fusco! So you want a laugh in a bad way. Okay. But keep the other side of your mouth oiled up too." Hig dropped his coat. "I'm your man, Gilson...."

§ 2 §

WHEN THEY saw the head cheerleader in uniform trot onto the field later, most of the squad were amazed. Long-waisted bulging-shouldered Red Enghott came over, wagging his head, a handsome guy with a petulant mouth. "Hell, Hig, do we look so awful from the sidelines?"

Hig kept dead-panned. "Well, maybe you've noticed I do lead the cheers with my back to the field."

They thought it was funny then. Beetling-browed Monk Stern, Number Three back, laughed and whacked Cruhos' shoulder. Jaslinsky, still limping from Saturday, said Hig could have his job against Western U. this week. But when Hig replaced Eddie Wright at the blocker post on the varsity in a dummy drill, they were puzzled. Cruhos scowled at Feet Penrusk outside him.

"What the devil does this mean, anyway?" he asked.

When Enghott named the K-84, Pat Fusco coached Hig. "Don't worry about any blocking, Barron. This is a delayed tackle smash. You just fake taking the leather—"

"Then go outside for the defensive left half. I know my assignment," Hig cut in.

Fusco reddened. "Smart boy, eh? Maybe you know the blocker back's assignment on all our plays, eh?"

Hig nodded with a bored look. "Sure. Got 'em all charted out. Every other back's assignment on every play, too." Somebody gave with a low nasty whistle in the background, and Hig chuckled inside. The sooner he went to work on this bunch, the better. The first step was to earn their hate.

Inside of five minutes, he had back up his assertion pretty well, though. Tuesday they settled down to the heavy-duty scrimmage, as Gilson prepared for Western U. B. Team on the offense. After a few plays, Hig touched Tubby Ellers' arm. Ellers was in charge of B Team.

"Watch your quarterback as he spins in the T," Hig said. "Sometimes he takes an extra half step and is off balance."

Tubby Ellers watched a couple of plays, nodded. "You're right." He was annoyed at having it pointed out to him, a coach. Something made him say, "It's easy to criticize; think you could do any better? Try it sometime, brother. Just try it."

"Name the time," Hig said with that cool insolence.

Ellers' jaw snapped up. Then, taking it on himself, he quickly inserted Hig Barron for the B Team spin man. At first, Hig was uncertain in his ball handling. He fumbled once, then got jumbled and tried to feed it to a back who wasn't there as he himself pivoted. There were some guffaws. Hig juggled a couple of times to slow up the plays. Then a faint calm smile came over his face as if finding himself in a familiar position. He began to pivot snappily, shuffling the ball around, faking it neatly. Ten minutes passed with the coaching staff bug-eyed and he was masking his moves with more and more assurance.

THAT EVENING, at the coaching staff conference in Gilson's cottage, Fusco said, "Something funny's going on there. That Barron is too familiar with the T. He's played football—and plenty of it—somewhere before."

Gilson smiled over a drink. "I don't care. I figured we'd lose a blocker when he put him in. But if he could only start a fire under those guys, it might be worth it. He can make that pivot. When we play him, we move Engott to the other halfback post and step up our offense."

Wednesday, Hig worked a long time at the spin with the varsity. He was no polished wonder, but it was plain he'd been there before. Plain too that he had a lot of natural grid-iron ability. Gilson told him he'd work at that post when he went in. That he called the plays well, too.

"All right," Hig said. He knew he should show some sign of elation, but he was worried that this new set-up might spotlight him. "And I got myself into it with my great big mouth," he said mentally. But he loved this grid game, and it was too damn difficult to hold back how much he knew about it.

Then it was Saturday afternoon and the orange-jerseyed Western U. team roared down the field behind the initial kickoff. The Red and Gold of Kenton began to roll, picking up two first downs. Enghott, looking brilliant, clicked on two short passes. Inside their own thirty five, the bull-like Orange line braced, but Monk Stern swept wide to the fifteen. An offside nullified a completed pass into the end zone. A backfield fumble lost Kenton another five, and the drive went out of the team; Western U. took over.

They smashed back past midfield. Kicked. Kenton had to punt back after one first down. Western drove again. Then Feet Penrusk seeped in, trapped a passer deep, nailed him. The ball rolled loose and was engulfed by a red and gold jersey. Jumbo Jaslinsky drove for six, then the Orange wall burst in and somebody bobbled in the Kenton back-

field. Monk grabbed it up, saw a hole through the middle, and sprinted through the split secondary to the twenty-seven. And Whisper Gilson sent Barron over the sideline, Wright coming out.

"All right," Hig said to them in the huddle. "Now, suppose you jerks quit riding on your luck and get down to football." He named the play, a crossbuck with Jaslinsky stabbing the line. "Don't be scared of those guys. Jumbo. None of 'em carry knives!"

THERE WAS the snapback, the drum of driving feet, the thud and grind of bodies in crashing contact on the line. The sound, the feel of it—something never thought to know again—started a thundering in Hig Barron's heart. He almost dropped the leather. Then he was immediately cool, poised, wheeling, faking. He slapped it into Jaslinsky's middle as he roared by like a big truck. He picked up four, would have gotten more if Red Enghott had blocked out that defensive halfback more cleanly.

Hig didn't miss that but he scourged Jaslinsky who'd come into the huddle with a satisfied grin despite a cut lip. "Ain't you just great though, Jumbo?" Hig let him have it. "A messenger boy could've gone through that hole! You got power, Jumbo, but so's a cannon. And somebody's got to pull the lanyard." He named the play, a pass feint with Jaslinsky off tackle.

The running Enghott cocked his arm, shovelled to Jaslinsky as Hig bumped the end from the other wing outside. Jaslinsky roared to the enemy seventeen for a first down. Enghott pitched to Penrusk in the flat but the whistle shrilled before the latter had taken two steps. Another one of those offsides. First and fifteen to go. And on the next play, the Orange line surged through and Hig himself was trapped with the leather for a loss. He could feel the team's morale sag.

"You fellas picked up any girls in the stands yet? I mean you, Scanlon. And you too, Cruhos!" the ex-

cheerleader lashed at them in the huddle. "If you didn't notice, that Orange line paid us a visit just then! Jaslinsky, I mustn't forget your age. We won't use you this time; we'll let Enghott make like a football player instead!" He named the play, an in-and-out.

Red Enghott was licking his lips, a sign of anger with him, as they swung into the T. The left side of the Red and Gold wall was swept back as Enghott went to the left. But Jaslinsky, blocking ahead of him like a berserk bull dozer, cleared the path to the outside. And Enghott was bumped out of bounds down on the ten. That made it third and three.

"We better smash it inside of tackle," Enghott said as they grouped.

"Just what they'd expect," Hig shot back with curling lip. "You afraid to get into that end zone—think it's radio active or something?" He called a pass play, flipped back to the cutting Red, then sifted through outside the guard spot. The aerial hit him in the chest as he turned with the rival secondary spread for a longer toss to the outside. Hig jumped out of his tracks.

The defensive center and a halfback smashed in on him. He didn't seem to be running hard, sort of dancing. Then he'd glided away from the center with a side-step, cut down field. Brought up short and let the halfback dive past him. Hig streaked off. The safety man cut in hard. But Monk Stern dashed in from the left and bumped him offstride just enough. Hig flitted over the goal-line in the coffin corner, touched it down. Stern rushed up and slapped his back heartily.

They kicked the extra point and Kenton was in front, 7-0. Hig Barron came out. But even as he trotted off he knew the move would breed resentment amongst those men on the field behind him.

"That was all right, Barron," Gilson said.

But Hig shook his head. "They better watch out. That Orange line's

going to get tougher. Kenton will need more fire than that before this one's over. Somebody's got to slap 'em in the face plenty more!"

3

WESTERN threatened twice before the quarter closed, but their aerial offense was ragged; the Red and Gold secondary could draw in tight against the line smashes. But Cruhos came out, badly punished. Monk Stern took a breather, went back in, and on the next play needed the trainer's aid after backing up the line against a tackle smash. Western U. rolled on to slam it over after the second period was a few minutes old. They got another drive going, came down into Kenton territory. Then Monk glued onto a long pass, broke away from the intended receiver, and brought it back to midfield.

"Get in there and throw the spurs to 'em, Barron," Gilson said.

"Here ~~comes~~ our little Pollyanna!" Hig pushed his head into the huddle with Enghott shifting to the half-back spot. "Now we're going to get told off, fellas!"

"Yeah, he's too good to play with us most of the time. Go ahead, tell us, Hig," Cruhos, back in, said chuckling.

Hig got it. These men were no thick-skulls. If he wasn't careful, they'd be laughing at him and his stuff. He sneered around, big eyes cold. "Nobody can do much with a bunch of stuffed uniforms who don't care much about whether they win! Alright, Enghott, throw away your press clips!"

He lashed them and laughed at them, insulted them, drove them down inside Western's twenty five. He pivoted and faked efficiently on the T. Used the flashy Enghott as a decoy to the outside while Monk sliced over the tackles. But he couldn't pull a touchdown out of his

hat that time. Gilson replaced Hig as the Orange took over. The ex-cheerleader sat out the rest of the half on the bench as the Orange, behind that brute of a line, went for another touchdown to make it 14-7.

"We'll get going in the next half," Red Enghott predicted easily between the halves. "Those ends can't fence me in all day!"

And the flashy hard-striding Enghott did turn the flank for a long run early in the second half. Then when Western intercepted a pass, the Kenton machine seemed to lose all incentive. Midway of the period the Orange juggernaut pounded yards for a touchdown to make it 21-7. Following the kickoff to Kenton, Western drew a holding penalty.

"Climb into the driver's seat, Barron," Whisper Gilson said as he sent him over the sideline.

And as he joined the huddle, jaw wagging, Hig had a fresh field tactic in mind. From the bench, he'd noted that when Red Enghott ran the team, he did most of the carrying on the sweeps himself. The solemn Monk Stern was put in the shade. So Hig gave it to Monk on a double reverse with Red blocking. It went for five. The others stared as the slim slave-driver abandoned his role, slapping Monk on the back.

"Okay, Monk! If you'd had any help, you'd have been away, kid. Come out of the coma, muscleheads!" He gave it as a delayed buck to Jaslinski. Tried to anyway. The fullback dropped it. Hig scooped it up, hopped over a prone for four yards. One of those orange-shirted giants smacked him straight up in the air. As he came up groggy, Hig felt the frigid fingers of fear pluck at his guts. Then he straightened his helmet and started yapping again, trying to forget the sensation.

HE SENT Monk on a sweep, complimented him warmly. The Monk grinned, eyes alight and eager.

Hig had Red pitch to Monk in the flat and the man who seldom got a chance to shine went for fourteen. Building up Monk, needling the rest, constantly bawling out Jaslinski, Hig sent them, fighting and seething at him, to the enemy fifteen—Jaslinski, stumbling some, into the line.

"Let's try lateral; their ends—" Red started to say.

"I'll do the thinking. You just remember to keep giving your profile to the stands, Red!" And he flung Jaslinski at the line again. The Orange forwards were like granite blocks. Jaslinski picked up inches and Hig told him he ran like a cow overdue for milking. Jaslinski looked at him stupidly, and Hig sent Jumbo to the outside on a reverse.

It was slick field generalship. Jumbo crossed standing up, the defense tricked by the fact the pile-driving Jumbo was always the inside man. Hig left the field after they made the extra point. He could see the respect in their faces even as they hated him.

Late in the fourth quarter after Western had kicked from the ten, it was Hig himself who set up the break. The score was still 21-14 against Kenton when Whisper Gilson despatched him back in. Taking a short pass in the flat from Red, Hig brought the stands to their feet. Eeling and ghosting with that peculiar ball-toting style, constantly changing pace without seeming to hurry he went for sixteen. Across midfield. Monk, playing all out after the flattery treatment, made it a first down on a double reverse.

"We're going all the way! You hear me, dopes?" Hig spat at them, using the confident note now. "All the way! You can do it!"

He sent Jaslinski in there at tackle on a cutback. Jaslinski stumbled at the line of scrimmage. "Take the damn glue off your cleats, Jumbo!" And he named him to lug the mail on a single reverse. The surprise worked, a man carrying right after he'd failed. Jumbo picked up five.

They huddled. Cruhos suddenly

yipped, "Hey, where's Jumbo?" And they looked around to see him standing in the enemy secondary with a drugged look on his face. Gilson had Harry Tames, a second-string fullback, racing in to supplant him.

THE SENSITIVE Hig could feel the team morale sag. Robbed of their crack line-smacker, they were ready to sink into their usual lethargy. He abruptly switched tactics, he put out a hand, patted a few shoulders. Then he carried himself on an in-and-out play with the blocking porous in front of him. A backer-up lifted him clear of his feet, sent him caroming sideward. But Hig seemed to drift like smoke from his arms, darted on a tangent suddenly picked up eleven and a first down. But the tackle that smeared him out of bounds rattled his back teeth. And that old fear spiked through him again.

But he was cocky when he joined the huddle. And kind, too. "Sure, you're all beaten up. Your legs are lead. But give it that one more big try, gang. You've got it!"

"What the hell is this?" growled Cruhos.

"What I said!" Hig came back. "Gilson on that bench believes in you guys. That crowd in the stands does too! And—I do. Give it, please." He was the superb actor with a crack in his voice. "Those bums there are cracking now. Finish the job. Make with the hot stuff you pack!"

They stared, blinked, and then they caught fire. With spinners and laterals and cutbacks, he sent them digging down deeper and deeper into Orange territory. Slashing. Taking losses as that overpowering line of Westerns, bolstered with big reserves, burst through at times. But bouncing back repeatedly to make it up he begged and pleaded. Then they were inside the fifteen but stopped twice. Hig took the leather, faked, fainted a sweep, faded on a play that Enghott, a crack passer, himself used from the quarterback spot. And he electrified the field

with a bullet pass to Enghott on the five.

It slipped from Red's hands. An Orange player plucked it from the air, cut around Red, came roaring back up the sideline. Was in the free save for Hig. And it was the passer's job to cover against an interception. Hig shifted out, gauged his stride. The runner feinted to the inside, then turned on the power. Hig Barron, with the cold sweat leaking inside his jersey, hesitated. He made a weak futile clutch at arm's length. The ball carrier shook off his hands scornfully and went all the way for a touchdown. With the minutes running out, it meant the ball game.

Wright came in for Hig. Hig said to Gilson as he crossed the sideline, "He fooled me. I thought he was going to cut the inside."

The head coach nodded and told him to go in, saying it was just a tough break. But swinging up the ramp under the stands, for a moment Hig was a man his teammates had never seen. The big ruthless eyes squeezed hard against bitter unshed tears. He knew he had lied to Whis-per Gilson about that missed tackle.

UP IN Randall Hall, he stalked his room that evening, trying to forget the bruises and throttle the recriminations. But he was too used to holding private post-mortems on games to stop it now. He rechecked every play he had called, thought of what he might have done in the circumstances. Then, too, he might have carried more himself. But he'd wanted to avoid the spotlight. And there was always that other danger...

He moped around, restless and discontented. Bill Sneddon had phoned to ask him to drop in at the Chi Epsilon dance that night, but Hig felt like nothing less than shaking the light fantastic. His thoughts returned to his last play of the game, the play that had cast the die irretrievably. If that pass had clicked, it would have been a touchdown, a tie score. And then anything might have happened. If Red Enghott had frozen onto that ball, there would

have been no runback, no phoney futile tackle such as he had made. His eyes slammed closed as if to wipe out the picture. But the image persisted, as vividly fresh as when it happened. That Orange pass interceptor roaring down on him and—He swore and pulled on his coat. A few stiff highballs down at Nick's would go good now.

Hell, he'd only agreed to play one game, so it made no difference. But that was eating on him too; he had failed to pull out that game, had not fired them enough to pull out a win. With his tough ego, he had coldly and honestly expected to do the trick.

There was a knock. Blackie Millard, the substitute end who roomed across the hall, came in with Put Lawlor. Lawlor was a graduate student who reported sports for one of the local sheets. Millard had a worried look on his baby face. Said Lawlor had just confirmed a tip that had come into the office.

"Yeah," said Lawlor, fussing with horn-rimmed glasses. "Jumbo Jaslinsky's in the infirmary. Collapsed with a bad brain concussion. Gilson refuses to make a statement."

Hig called the infirmary at once. Jaslinsky was resting comfortably but could have no visitors. Now Hig realized why Jumbo had caved in on that last drive. "Wish I could see him," Hig said as he hung up.

"You just lie low tonight, Hig," Millard said.

"What? Say, I'm no criminal! I—"

Put Lawlor cut in. "Blackie's right, Barron. The story's going around the campus. There's some ugly feeling. On the way over, I ran into a couple of players—not mentioning names. And—well, don't go prancing around."

Hig scowled. "You'd think I slugged Jumbo!"

"No," cracked Lawlor. "And don't go melodramatic on us, kid. But some of the men feel you rode him ragged when he was hurt. That the way you kept throwing him in there got him the concussion. And they aren't ex-

actively soft-peddalling their feelings, either. So—"

"Just keep out of the public eye till the hot heads cool off," Millard pleaded.

Hig grinned mockingly and shed his sports jacket. "Good thing I got my dinner jacket pressed this week. Almost forgot that Chi Epsilon dance." Pleading did no good. It just wasn't his way to crawl into a hole, to act as if he had something to be ashamed of. His assignment had been to drive that team, to spur them ragged. He'd tried. Jumbo's injury was one of the fortunes of the game.

WHEN HE joined the stag line in the living room of the sprawling Chi Epsilon house, he sensed the frigidity of the atmosphere. Ignoring it, he danced with a blonde town girl, bumped into Little Joe Scanlon, grinned. Scanlon only gave him a stiff nod. "Oh, my aching back," Hig muttered. Then he spotted Kathy Wills, a sloe-eyed brunette, the glamour number of the campus that season. Red Enghott had been giving her a big rush all fall. A few minutes later, Hig cut in on her. When the music stopped, they strolled out onto the porch overlooking the lake. A big moon grinned atop the bluffs across the water.

Kathy started to tell him what a swell game he'd played that afternoon. Hig shrugged. "And didn't I wear my helmet at a nice jaunty angle, too?" he snapped. "Save it, baby!"

"Well, Hig, was it strictly a one-night stand or are you staying out for the team?" she persisted.

He knew who wanted to know that. Red Enghott. Red who took it as a reflection on his own ability that Hig was inserted to run the team in the crucial spots. And, looking by her, Hig saw Red himself with a couple of other chaps standing in one of the French windows further down the porch. Perhaps it was just the devil jumping up in Hig Barron. Or maybe he was remembering how, when they'd come into the field-house after the defeat, Red had asked

sarcastically, "Now I wonder who cost us that one?" That crack had hurt.

Now, Hig leaned over Kathy. "Let's talk about something interesting, baby. You. And you don't look half bad tonight, hag?" Then he bent and kissed her.

Red Enghott saw all right. He came swaggering down the veranda, sneering, Tuck Cruhos the tackle and Monk Stern behind him. "Pipe the big grid star in action, boys! Say, how much did Wonder Boy win for us by?"

Hig told Red to be his age. But when the glovering quarterback pushed a step closer, Hig swung Kathy to one side. "Okay, Red. Now go ahead and shoot off your mouth!"

"You did that this afternoon and put a guy in the hospital, Barron. Think you'd be ashamed to show your big bare face in public!"

The ever cool Hig chuckled. He just didn't know how to give ground. Then he said the worst thing possible without quite knowing why at the moment. "Red, I disappointed myself today. But you act like a guy who's been shown up, fella!"

THE EXPECTED right-hand swing whipped over. Moving inside it, Hig took it on his shoulder, grabbed Enghott's arms, and started to swing him away and off balance. Only then did he come to realize how much hatred he'd engendered in those players that afternoon. Somebody else's fist, he never was certain whether it belonged to Cruhos or Monk Stern, slammed. Hig found himself sitting on his pants on the porch, skull feeling like a busily-rung gong. He started to get up. Saw Blackie Millard wrestling Enghott away. And then burly Pat Fusco was on the scene, calling them all a bunch of babies whacking Cruhos over the jaw with an open hand, and breaking it up.

"Will you please go home, Mr. Bombshell?" he asked Hig as he helped him up and steadied him. Outside, beside Blackie Millard's car,

the backfield coach slapped Hig on the back. "Look, kid, you did your best today. But you didn't have to rub it in to Enghott tonight. Your job's done."

"Yeah?" Hig heard himself laugh coldly as he climbed into the car. "Be seeing you, Fusco." He might have added, "On Monday." Because he knew then, and knowing gave him a sense of relief. After Red Enghott's challenge, after catching that belt on his whiskers, he couldn't quit. He had to go on for another game, at least....

4

MONDAY afternoon, a little late, as the ends were drilling at getting down under punts, Hig walked out onto the practice field. Whisper Gilson was surprised to see him. "You don't have to come out, Barron," the head coach said. "You only promised for one game."

Hig cocked an eye at Fusco the backfield aid wearing a smirk on his face. "Sure, I know, Gilson. Only it didn't take that time, and I don't like flop acts. So I'm out to give 'em another dose. Okay with you?"

Whisper Gilson was inwardly pleased. It bulwarked his belief in his ability to read men. He'd had a hunch from the first that this poised cold-eyed Barron had steel inside him, but he wasn't so pleased by the time the following day's workout was half over. Hig Barron wasn't getting results with the varsity. Or, rather, he was getting them in reverse.

Barking the starting signals with the big team on the offense against the C outfit, Hig himself sensed it. He was up against a slowdown strike. With him in the driver's seat, the varsity was barely going through the motions. Blocking lacked snap or authority. Time and again the big line had the C Team forwards get the jump on them. Ball-handling in the backfield was sloppy, devoid of deftness. With the exception of Mizner, substitute fullback for the still

missing Jumbo Jaslinsky, the backs were laggards, sullen, coming out of their tracks as if they had glue on their cleats. He kept tongue-lashing them. It was Penrusk on an end-around and he was driven back as he failed to cut sharply enough for a gap. Hig gave them the works again with his barbed tongue.

"Murder with the mouth, aren't you, Barron?" Enghott shot back at him in the huddle. "Aching to fix somebody else up like you fixed Jumbo, aren't you?"

Hig ignored it for the moment. "All right, Monk! You on that B-12. Show 'em how it should be done, Mister! Now—!"

"I can get along without any buttering up by you, Barron," Monk came back swiftly.

"Be grateful, Monk," said Cruhos. "He's giving you a kind word!"

Hig knew then what he was up against, that he was practically as good as stymied as far as his value to the team. A down later, he faked to Penrusk, then sliced to the right to pitch one. But three linemen, still amazed by the opposition they hadn't met, were in to smother him. He was glad when Whisper Gilson dismissed the men who'd been in the game early. But he was puzzled by Monk Stern's attitude. As a part of his psychological technique, Hig had figured to build up the ego of the forgotten overshadowed man of the backfield. He'd praised him plenty in the Western game. Monk's turning on him was a mystery.

WEDNESDAY evening, walking down from the field with Blackie Millard, Hig began to wonder if he should throw in the towel. Millard said:

"Hig, better put away the cat-o-nine-tails for a spell. Ease up on 'em; they're sore. They're even talking about pulling a strike on you and—"

"Ha! They're just making with the big wind, kid!"

They moved past the white Community Center in the sharp autumn night. Blackie finally said, "Hig, I didn't want to tell you, but I over-

heard Fusco and Whisper Gilson talking on the sidelines. Fusco said the varsity resents the fact that you're only sent in when the glory road beckons. And that they have to soak up the punishment and the drudgery all the way."

"Yeah? What did Gilson say?"

Millard cleared his throat. "Gilson said he guessed you had shot your psychological bolt."

Hig kicked at a pile of russet leaves. "I was given the assignment—I didn't ask for it—of getting that pack of brawn and speed keyed to a hair-trigger fighting pitch! I'll show them and Gilson come Saturday. Watch me!" But he knew he was whistling in the dark...

THAT NIGHT he sat late in his study weighing the thing. Maybe it would be best for everybody concerned if he did turn in his uniform. Now, because of their attitude, he only handicapped the team when he was in the lineup. They deliberately slumped, laughed at or ignored his needling. And the team ~~came~~ first. Then there was his own interest. Sunday he had mailed a letter to his uncle's Chicago office, telling him he had played one game, that he expected to go in another. But if he quit now, perhaps Uncle Lewis would forgive him.

Just as he noted that it was almost midnight, the phone rang. It was Put Lawlor, the sports writer for *The Blade*. "Got some news you might like, Barron," he led off. "You've been getting a rough deal up on that field this week. I've seen how those muscle heads are letting you down."

Hig told him it was all right, they just didn't understand the role he was playing. Lawlor laughed it off. He said Hig had a right to be sore, and that one of those wise Joes would be on the spot tomorrow. Stern.

"What's Monk done?" Hig asked.

"Not 'done'. *Did!*" corrected Lawlor. "He played pro football some years ago. Well, semi-pro anyway. A couple games with some small-time club in Kankakee. It just came

in on the news ticker, Mister. It's the dope!"

"Are you sure, Lawlor? How solid is the report?"

"Don't worry, Hig. It's the real McCoy. Some pro grid player in Chicago let it slip. He played on that same semi-pro club with Stern three-four years ago. He let it slip and a Chi sports columnist picked up the story."

Hig swore between his teeth. "That's going to be bad. Can they prove the authorities here knew that when they gave him an athletic scholarship?"

"There's the real angle on the whole thing," Lawlor said. "Monk Stern isn't up here on an athletic scholarship. The pro player, Monk's old teammate, knew about that too. Red Enghott's old man is putting Stern through college. Paid his way here so he could play football for Kenton. Alumpus finances hired hand player! Nice, isn't it?"

Hig Barron did some quick thinking. Asked Lawlor if he had contacted Gilson or the graduate manager of athletics for a statement. Gilson was out of town overnight, Lawlor said. And the graduate manager could not be located. *The Blade* was giving it a front page spread in the morning.

For some minutes after he hung up, Hig did some hard thinking. He didn't feel like gloating much. Now though, realizing how Monk was under Red Enghott's thumb, Hig understood Monk's sudden switch in his attitude toward him. "Would serve them right to let the thing blow up in their faces," he muttered once, striding around. Then he pushed his personal feelings out of the matter. Stern, he knew, came from a poor family. What if the guy had picked up a few bucks some years ago playing just two games of semi-pro football? It didn't make a tramp athlete out of him. Actually he'd been so lacking in a gridiron reputation he hadn't even gotten an athletic scholarship from the school. If a friend's father wanted to put him through college, it was no crime.

"Hell no," Hig said and reached

for the phone again. He called Monk Stern's fraternity house and had to wait while they got him out of bed. Stern's voice took on a guarded note when he learned who it was.

"What business is it of yours, Barron?" he snapped when Hig asked if he'd ever played football for money.

"A press story is breaking that you did, Monk."

The running back gasped and choked back an oath at the other end. "A guy will take any job when he's busted and has to eat. But—" An excited note thinned his voice.

"Keep your pants on, Monk," Hig said, "and play dumb. When the reporters hit you in the morning, all you know is that you were asked to play in a couple of games by a friend. Got that?"

"Yes?" said Stern dubiously.

"And the guy was betting on the games and laid a couple of bucks for you. That's all. See? Afterward he paid you off on your piece of the bets. That was what you thought it was, anyway. You don't remember much. The club seemed like a pick-up team to you, anyway. That's all you know. Get it?"

"Yeah, I think so. That—that seems like a pretty good line of snow, Hig... Say, why are you doing this anyway?"

Hig chuckled. "So I won't miss the pleasure of peeling your hide off on that field," he snapped, and hung up. If he appeared to go soft in the eyes of those guys his role as a slave-driver would be blasted. And that was his great value to the team...

BY THE TIME he went up to the field the following afternoon, the "great gridiron scandal" had collapsed like a pricked bubble. The neontime news broadcast from the city admitted as much. The university's statement that Stern had not received an athletic scholarship, backed by Monk's hazy recollection of receiving a few dollars for betting on the team, made the first sensational reports ridiculous. But when Hig showered after the drill, it seemed there had been no change in

the attitude of the team toward him. Then he ran into Red Enghott outside the fieldhouse door and learned why.

"Smart boy, aren't you, Barron?" sneered the regular quarterback. "Pretty cute of you getting Monk out of that jam."

Hig frowned. "Would you rather I'd let him get trapped?"

"Don't be so damn altruistic, kid. We know you," Red came back. Jumbo Jaslinski may not be able to go on Saturday. And if Monk had been out the picture too, we wouldn't be able to afford a chinadoll back—meaning you—in there. We'd have to have four *working* backs. Yeah, you played your cards pretty—to protect yourself, Barron. Come on, Tuck." He and Cruhos went down the path.

Hig stood there in the darkness, twisting a foot into the gravel. "I'm sure in it up to my neck now... Up that well-known creek without a paddle. Nothing I can do is going to be right..."

Then it was Saturday afternoon, frosty-sharp, clear as they trotted out to meet the Light Blue of Mondson. They were a rangy gang, cocky in the bargain, a little green in the line. But they had a couple of wingmen who crashed in like highballing trucks, and they had the fast-breaking Rory Menlo as a triple-threat, a winged-heeled guy. The dead-panned back was always a threat to go for the distance.

"That guy's jet-propelled," said Tuck Cruhos, watching Menlo take a few practise sprints at the other side of the gridiron.

"Lansing held him," Hig snapped. "Of course, Lansing has some bona fide football players in the lineup." But his remark was ignored.

Then, taking the kickoff, Mondson began to shoot their stuff from a single wing, aided and abetted by sharp brush-blocking. They were packed with confidence, purpose, that contrasted with Kenton. Ball carriers began to run and cut. They snapped from the huddle with a military precision. After all, they'd held Notre Dame to a tie earlier in

the season. They were in a hurry to settle this one. Twice Menlo was almost away. Then Red intercepted a pass on his own thirty, slashed back to midfield.

Hig was off the bench, howling angrily. More alert blocking and Red would have gone all the way to pay dirt. Gilson was off the bench too. Sent in Millard. Hig eyed the head coach. But Hig didn't get the go sign.

Driving from the T, that explosive admixture of guile and power, Kenton looked hot for a couple of minutes. Cruhos at left tackle was uprooting the right side of the visitors' line. They moved deeper into Mondson territory. A play stopped. Then a holding penalty. And Kenton seemed to collapse. Mondson took over. Two plays later, Menlo took a pass in the flat and galloped all the way. Score, Mondson 7, Kenton 0.

Shortly after taking the kickoff, Red Enghott connected with a long pass heave. "Now!" Hig said to himself. Surely this was the psychological moment to shoot him in. Whisper Gilson did put in Brown to replace the substitute fullback, Mizner. But the head coach didn't even glance Hig's way. Then Hig got it. Gilson was bowing to the team; Hig wouldn't be used...

KENTON got a drive going, then kicked their chance with a fumble. Both teams duelled, swapping punts. The game moved into the second period. Enghott made some big games on sweeps, but the Red and Gold never really took command. And, suddenly, like lightning out of a clear sky, Mondson scored twice to jump it to a 21-0 game. The ultimate outcome seemed foregone.

On the bench, the bitterness boiling inside Hig Barron was as tangible as the taste of gall. He never realized how badly he wanted to play, how much he'd been counting on it. If he didn't get in there, pull the trick, that tackle he'd failed to make last week would haunt him for the rest of his days. He was vaguely aware of the graduate manager of athletics in that loud checked topcoat hurrying

by him. On the field, there was time out. Hig noticed the grad manager talking excitedly to Whisper Gilson. The head coach called Fusco over, then left the bench and went up the ramp into the fieldhouse with the manager.

Out on the field, an Enghott pass was intercepted. But two plays later, Little Joe Scanlon broke through and fell on a Mondson fumble. Tubby Elfers ran down the bench to talk with Fusco, now in charge of the team. Fusco watched one play fail, rubbing his jaw hesitantly. A double lateral was smeared for a loss. And Fusco popped off the bench, motioning.

"Go in for Wright, Barron!" he ordered.

When Hig joined the huddle at midfield, he could feel the wall of hostility. And Cruhos, with a couple of face bruises, promptly warned him.

"Listen, Mr. Mouth! Try keel-hauling me just once today and I'm starting 'Operation Homicide.' Get me?"

Hig gave with the cold smile. "I see. You guys wanta lose in your own way and at your own leisure, huh?" But he was bluffing. He knew it was really racked against him now.

Red Enghott said hoarsely. "We just aren't running for you, Barron. We can let those other guys murder you, too! So keep buttoned up! Whisper can have it any way he wants—you hollering in the glory spots—or ten varsity men working for him!"

Hig sucked his breath. This was bad. "Okay, heroes." He named a double reverse. No gain. He straightened his helmet after having been knocked kicking by one of those Mondson ends. And then he let them have it with both barrels, hurling epithets at them individually, calling them cows. "Now, you bunch of splayhoofed fugitives from a squat-tag game, show what you can do, will you? You got the stuff and—" He was begging now.

"Wind's cheap," said Enghott.

HIG CALLED his own number, carried a cutback, but was

snowed under after darting for a first down. With any kind of decent blocking, he really might have gone places. Then it was Feet Penrusk on an end-around. Penrusk was sluggish, trapped behind the line. Trailing the play, Hig shouted. Penrusk lateralled to him. Cutting to the inside, Hig spun from one man, threw open the throttle with a burst of speed, whipped back to the outside. Two men seemed to have him. He gave one a leg, took it away, skidded toward the sideline with that peculiar shifty gait. Then he tight-rope walked it down the line, baffling them with his change of pace. Thirty thousand spectators hit their feet. Hig outran the speedy Menlo, pulled the safety man off balance, then danced away from him and over the goal-line as the half ended.

It was 21-7 when they went into the locker room. Red said something about getting underway for sure in the next half. And the Hig understood completely for the first time. Red's words were automatic, a form of self deception. Actually they knew they *wouldn't* get going in the second half. This bunch, Hig saw, really had no deep faith in themselves, had no idea of their true potentialities. They—then Fusco came over and said Gilson wanted him.

Hig clattered over the concrete floor on his cleats and pushed open the door of the head coach's office. And big white-thatched blustery Lewis Barron, his uncle, whirled around from pounding the coach's desk. Flying back from Europe, he'd decided to pay Hig a surprise visit, dropped down at the airport only to find his nephew was in a football game.

"Higby!" he roared. "What the devil are you doing?"

Hig flushed and for once, his poise left him. He shuffled. He simply said he thought he could help the team, and that he had written a letter to the Chicago office notifying his uncle. Gilson stepped up.

"Mr. Barron, I urged him to play. He didn't want to. And I take full responsibility," the head coach said in that husky thin voice. "I—"

"You might have murdered the boy—or almost, anyway!" roared the refrigerator tycoon. The office door still stood open. They couldn't help but get every word of it in the locker room. Higby was a sensation in high school, a veritable sensation. Yes! Then he received a spinal injury in making a tackle. And—"

HE WENT ON to tell almost the same story Hig himself had related to Gilson in the beginning. Only, at that time, Hig had inserted a small white lie, naming an imaginary brother as the victim. Lewis Barron described how Hig's left side had been paralyzed for weeks. How, the following season, he had gone through an agony of mental torture in trying to make himself play again. And how, finally, he, Lewis Barron, had sent Hig away to prep and promised to cut him off penniless if he ever played again.

Gilson said in an awed voice, "I never knew what I was asking him to do, Mr. Barron. Why—"

"Gilson, if he got hit in the spine where he received that injury—well, God alone knows how it might affect him," Barron said.

Gilson nodded. "Get out of the uniform, Hig."

Hig looked once pleadingly at his burly uncle. Just the rest of this one game. Lewis Barron came over and took his nephew by the shoulders. "Uncle, I got hit there once last Saturday and nothing happened. If you—" But Lewis Barron shook his head grimly.

Hig asked permission to sit out the rest of the game in uniform on the bench. That was granted. He walked out into the dressing quarters stiffly. Red Enghott came over and took his arm, face morose.

"Hig, we didn't know from nothing," he said.

Hig saw the rest of the team, silent, looking at him, but looking at him in a new way. "Forget it, Red." He only wished he could forget that he had tried to play again. It was like reopening an old wound...

5

TO OPEN THE third quarter, the great Menlo almost tore free again. But Kenton held for downs and took the ball. They got a march underway. It fizzled out though down in the Light Blue territory. After that, Tuck Cruhos rose like a towering behemoth on that line on defensive play. Almost single-handedly, boring in like a threshing machine, he kept Mondson from scoring in that period. The fourth quarter opened.

And it became more and more obvious that Kenton was going nowhere. Their drive lacked snap and fire. As if they knew themselves, as they did. On the bench, Hig sat gnawing on a set of knuckles. Sure they were trying, but a team that doesn't believe it can do it isn't going to do it. He watched their chances glimmer away. And his own, his own chances of rehabilitating himself, of beating that old fear, dwindle away too.

A man called imperatively, leaning over the front edge of the concrete stands. An assistant manager went over. Then the latter was in front of Hig, shoving a piece of paper at him. Hig opened it, eyes shifting out to the play repeatedly. Then he almost jumped out of his cleats. The note read:

Somebody has to set off a fire-cracker under that team. If you think you can do it—it's up to you, Higby.

Lewis

Hig could sense it between the lines. Somehow his uncle had guessed how his heart was cracking. Then Hig was down waving it under Whisper Gilson's nose, stripping out of his parka. Gilson tried to protest. It was dangerous.

"I got hit smack on the spot last week, Whisper, and nothing happened. Let me get in and go to work on those chumps," Hig cried. "My God, I played for you. Now you owe me this chance!"

"All right." And Pat Fusco gave

Hig a slap on the back and a "Good luck, kid," as he raced on and Wright turned to come out.

"Now, you bunch of clunkheads, I will show you how to take that hunk of leather somewhere," Hig opened up on them in the huddle. They were on their own thirty-eight after Mondson had booted. He swept his big eyes over the ring of faces. Saw there was a different reaction to his needling now.

They had learned the terrific risk he was taking in playing. And earlier they had seen he was far more than a china-doll quarterback when he'd carried for their only score. He was no longer the man they loved to hate. They would try. But they weren't angered, riled up.

Sneaking on an in-and-out behind hard blocks, not committing himself till he saw his opening, Hig slipped ahead for seven. "See?" he said. "It can be done. You guys've been bluffing yourself. You don't know how good you are," he insisted, shifting his psychological tactics.

AND THE FIRE began to blaze a little brighter in them. They broke faster though leaden-legged from the battering at the hands of those big wingmen. He launched them on a march, lifted them when an offside and a backfield fumble cost them yardage. Every once and again he lashed with the vitriolic tongue of old, praised more often. But Mondson held inside their own twenty, and on the second play after they took possession, Menlo swept wide and broke free. A big man, he busted up the sideline with Hig alone between him and touchdown heaven, the Kenton end zone.

Hig closed, tasting the old fear just as if it were a bitter pill actually on his tongue. Imagination sounded wild alarms in his brain. He hesitated, legs slowing as he swung over toward the line. Nausea threatened to gag him. And then he took the bit in his teeth, crowded, waited for the feint, and nailed the big Mondson back by one leg just as it seemed he would get away. That did something to the Kenton machine, knowing, as

they did, what it had cost him.

The forward wall braced. Tackling was savage, and Mondson was forced to boot it. But Penrusk half blocked the kick. Monk Stern chased it slanting across the field, backing, scooped it — the hop on his thirty and battered right back to midfield. The fourth quarter had already opened.

"We're beating that clock, gang," he told them.

And they rolled, crashed, roared — he handled them neatly from that T. But down on the enemy fifteen they were stopped. And Jumbo Jaslinsky came into the game for the first time that day. Hig could feel his influence wane suddenly. They were remembering what he'd done to Jaslinsky last week. What they thought he'd done anyway. Hig sent him in on a delayed buck. Jumbo bombed through for eight and a first but failed to rise.

The trainer came out. After a couple of minutes, Jumbo was up, swaying and pawing his head. "Got smacked the same spot where I got it last week," he said. "But I'm all right now, Joe. It's the fourth quarter."

"What's the score?" tested the trainer.

"21-7, we're trailing. I'm all right. Got it at the start of the second half last week. Couldn't remember anything after that, but I know what I'm doing now, Joe. Let me stay in!"

"Start of the second half—," Little Joe Scanlon repeated. Players exchanged puzzled looks. Hig watched them. Saw them realize, then, that he had not been responsible for Jaslinsky's brain concussion. They had wronged him again; he hadn't even been in the game when Jumbo got it.

JUMBO stayed in. "Let's take it over with no more damn nonsense," Hig said in the huddle. And they went over on two plays, Red taking it to the three on a cutback and Jumbo himself then ramming it over. Score: Mondson 21, Kenton 14.

Mondson tried to get wound up after taking the kickoff. Menlo did razzle-dazzle away for fifteen yards on one run. Hig ran up to spike a

finger at big battered Tuck Cruhos the tackle.

"This bunch depends on you, Tuck! You're the monkey that can bust their attack, mister," he told him, not harshly this time.

And Cruhos dug in, slinging away his helmet. He smeared two plays. A kick and Hig launched another touchdown drive. But Lady Luck threw the breaks against them again after two consecutive first downs. A long Enghott pass clicked but was called back because of an extra man in motion in the backfield. A spinner and then Hig jump-passed on the dead run. A blue-shirted player materialized from nowhere to intercept.

"Go get that ball!" Hig ordered. "Take it away!"

But they were almost shot and the big clock hands were knifing down the remaining minutes. And Mondson, deep at every position, shoved in a batch of big fresh linemen. They picked up fourteen, then were held, and prepared to kick.

"Block it, you meatheads!" Hig barked.

"What do you want—miracles?" snapped Enghott.

Hig gave him a grin. "Nope. Just want to see a team play up to its ability! Don't you guys know how good you are?"

They looked at him, wonderingly, then they went to work. Monk Stern brought the short hurried kick back to the forty. A cutback and a sweep failed to gain much. With Enghott swinging wide as a decoy, Hig himself skidded off right tackle, seemed snowed under. Then he came out of the heap to go on for six more. Those Mondson players really smacked him down when they finally cornered him after his dancing skittering run. Hig was groggy — he moved back to the huddle. But he snapped and snarled at them — savagely as ever. Then it was Enghott, faking again as he dropped back — if to pitch one. A lateral to Hig and the slim quarterback sifted through the center to pick up a first down. On the next play, he snaked out to the left on a naked reverse, then toe-danced and eeled and ca-

romed his way to the Mondson fifteen with the stands a-roar.

They were staring at him when he came back to call the next play. Tuck Cruhos muttered, "Hell, it couldn't have been just luck three times in a row, I guess!" And Hig Barron knew then that he had convinced them he was more than just the Mouth out there, that he was a grid man in his own right.

But he still flailed them orally. "You tramps, the blocking stank on that one! Don't you flatheads ever wake up?" But they only grinned a little; this guy could call them anything now.

A sweep failed. Enghott faked a heave, shoved to Hig who sliced inside tackle. He picked up four but was simply blotted out by the blue-jerseyed men who swarmed on him. Mondson had realized Hig was the key man of the Red and Gold machine and were putting it to him. He half rose, then flopped back and lay stretched out.

HIS OWN teammates rushed to him, turned him over gently. A great gasp rose from the stadium. First aid kit rattling, the trainer rushed onto the field. Hig lay with his eyes closed. He got the smelling salts, the sponge at the back of the neck.

"Where'd you get it?" Joe the trainer asked.

Hig opened his eyes weakly. He let himself be helped up. They walked him around. Cruhos husked, "You better go out, Hig! You've done your share. Go ahead!"

The trainer steered Hig toward the sidelines. After a few steps, Hig whispered, "Get the hell outa here, Joe. This is just an act to get those guys wild." And he pulled loose and ran unsteadily back for the huddle.

He named the play, beat his hands to send them wheeling.

But Cruhos paused a moment. "You saw what they did to the kid," he snorted. "You saw. Now we give them the same! Ya hear?"

They did—and obeyed. Tuck Cruhos practically uprooted the right side of the Blue line. Blockers

scythed men down as if they aimed to bury them. Jumbo bombarded the tackle twice and went over. When Cruhos clicked on the placement try, the game was dead-locked, 21-21. Sounds welled in waves of wild exultation from the stands. It was wonderful. This Kenton team had come battling out of the ruck to tie it up.

But the men, walking back to kickoff, while they felt good, didn't expect victory. Mondson would receive and have possession of the ball. And the minutes were running thinner and thinner.

"Maybe they'll fumble," Little Joe said.

"We're going to get 'em anyway," Hig snapped back. He had to make it good, too. This would be his last game.

Mondson brought the kickoff back to their own thirty-six. Menlo returned to action from the bench. And Mondson was a nervy team; they didn't intend to settle for a tie either. With the threat of his breakaway prowess, Menlo swept wide then connected on two short passes on the run to put the leather in Kenton territory. Kenton had to take time out for Penrusk. Hig came in and begged them to hold, switching his psychology again.

IT WAS BIG Jumbo, backing up the line, who bulled in against a reverse and bounced Menlo so hard he thudded. And the Mondson star quitted the game for keeps, limping off the field on an injured knee. A few minutes later, they kicked into the end zone and Kenton took possession on their own twenty. That other goal-line looked miles away.

"Think we can do it?" Scanlon asked in the huddle.

"Think?" Hig said. "We're going to. They haven't got a chance against you guys. If you'll just wake up and discover how hot you are!"

They exchanged looks. Monk Stern spat cotton. "It he says we're bums, we are bums. If he says we can do it, we can! Come on!"

With a cold daring, Hig caught Mondson flat-footed as he spun, faked twice, then jumped and flipped

■ short one over the line to Red Enghott. Towing two tacklers, Red took the leather to the thirty-one for ■ first down. But the Blue line halted Jumbo. On the next try, an offside cost them five yards. It was the kind of thing that usually took the heart out of them.

But Hig pleaded and praised in the huddle. "They've had all the luck. You gotta beat them and the breaks! You've been great, great. Don't let it go to waste now, gang!" And he sent big Jumbo again on ■ cutback over the strong side. Jumbo uprooted men to pick up four. And then Hig himself raced up outside him, yipped for the lateral. Got it, spun wildly, drifted away from a defense back like ■ floating feather. Arms clutched vainly at the will-o'-the-wisp as he zigzagged and cut and skidded like ■ man on skates. Men were left sprawled in his wake as he dazzled them with that breath-stopping unpredictable change of pace. He crossed midfield before he was nailed from behind.

And then, begging and pleading, exhorting and praising, Hig Barron ran his machine inside the thirty. But the going was more and more rugged as Mondson poured in fresh strength. The Blue line sifted in to smear two attempts. Now the clock was down to less than two minutes.

"One big last try!" Hig almost prayed with them. "Cruhos. Red. Jumbo. One big last one! Show 'em how hot you really are." He swayed on his feet, voice cracked with emotion.

Then he was slicing out wide to the right as if on a sweep. Falling back deeper and deeper. He fainted ■ heave to Monk just back of the Blue line, twisted and cut back the other way. Beled away from a charging man as the crowd gasped. He darted, stopped, cocked his arm again. Then he reversed the field again and sprinted back toward the sideline. It was incredible the way he kept from being tackled. He went up into the air as if climbing on stilts and pitched. Down on the ■ eighteen, close to the sideline, Red Enghott picked the wash off the line and dog-fought

his way down to the ten. That was it.

A tackle drive was knocked for ■ two-yard loss. Hig walked into the huddle and gave them a cold look. "Going to let them take it away from you now?" he asked drily.

THEY WEREN'T. With him sobbing at them, Jumbo pile-drove his way to the five on two tries. And then Red Enghott, with Blue defenders being blocked ■ if they were hit by land mines, sneaked away on ■ in-and-out and galloped over standing up. Cruhos missed the placement try. But the Red and Gold led, 27-21.

There were only seconds to go. After the kickoff, Mondson gambled with desperate long passes. Two were knocked down and the game ended. Hig pulled off his helmet and wobbled toward the bench. He just wanted to stretch out and lie without moving a muscle for ■ long long time.

Whisper Gilson ran onto the field to hug him wildly. "You were terrific, boy, terrific! That was the kind of leadership ■ coach dreams about, boy!" he husked in that whispering voice. And his eyes were suspiciously misty.

Then the team caught up with the time slave-driver they had hated. Cruhos shook his shoulder in his big hands.

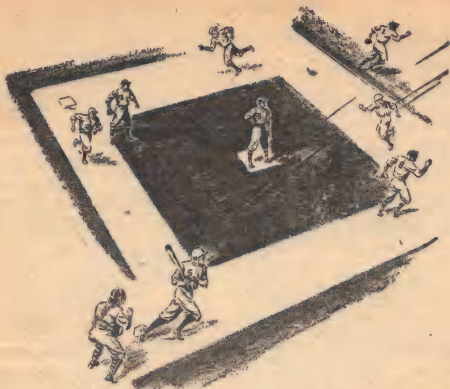
"You little fanged-tongued devil, you made us do it at last!" he cried. "You made us do it!"

Red Enghott pushed in and gripped Hig's hand. "You're the boss man, Hig! You proved it. I only wish we were going to have you for the rest of the season. I'll never be able to run a game like that. Never!"

That made Hig really feel good. "By the way, Red," he said weakly. "Don't worry about Kathy. I'm practically engaged to ■ girl back home." He stumbled from fatigue.

It was Little Joe Scanlon and Monk who hoisted him off the ground. Then it was ■ triumphal procession along the sideline. Hig spotted his Uncle Lewis in the stands, hands clasped above his head prize-fighter fashion. It was ■ great chok-

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Bats for Brains

By James Blish

When a pitcher's caught between his inner urge to play with his heart and pressure to take it easy, play it smart and keep in there to make more dough his game's going to go sour in a big way. And Rip Gamble knew that he wouldn't be in baseball much longer no matter how he played !!!

IF RIP GAMBLE had ever played good baseball there wan't much sign of it as far. He toed the mound and considered the matter glumly. Since he'd come back to the Hornets he'd done nothing. Patsy Kelly couldn't have done better except take showers with the rest of the team.

Already, on the top half of the fifth against the rapidly climbing Trojans, he'd allowed three hits and a walk, two of which the contenders had made into scores. And his contribution toward evening the tally had

been to fan both times the batting order had gotten around to him. That last business was the worst part of it; he'd been rated in the old days as something more than a smooth pitcher—as a batman with a good eye for another man's ball. And the Trojans' Paul Horton was making a monkey of him on both ends of the line.

Bud Martinson, the Hornet short-stop, drew in a little. Rip watched him out of the corner of his eye. So I can't field, either, eh?

But all the infielder said was,

"Batter up, Rip. Throw him out, boy, throw him out."

The catcher wiggled his fingers in the palm of his glove. Low and fast. Rip wound up deliberately, latching three long fingers tight around the horseshide. When he uncorked it, it was fast, but he knew by the way it left his hand that it wasn't going where it should.

It skimmed across the plate so far inside that the Trojan batter had to jump. Mickey scooped it out of the dust and pegged it to second, where the enemy's Niels Bjoernefeld had taken a long lead. Rip swore under his breath—it was a damn fool throw, bound to take at least two years to go that distance. He leapt for it as it whirled over his head—

But it was at the high point of its arc and just tipped his mitt. From there it bounced a little higher, while Rip went down again, his fingers stinging, and then fell suddenly to the turf. By the time Bud was on it, Bjoernefeld was cleating the bag at third.

The Hornet baseman pegged the ball to Rip with an obvious gesture of disgust. Rip flushed slowly. Mickey's try would have arrived at second about the time Bjoernefeld would be crossing home plate—the only chance was to intercept it and try to put him out at third. But it looked bad from the field, and worse from the stands; he could hear the fans all too clearly. He hoped Jane wasn't among them.

Mickey was signalling again, this time for a slow curve, low again. Mickey was a terrific batter and could pluck a ball out of the air from impossible angles, but sometimes he didn't show much judgment. Rip knew this Trojan from the old days, had played with him on the Cougars; the man had never been known to be fooled by a curve.

Abruptly he made up his mind. He wouldn't suffer for Mickey's errors this time. He socked the ball into the glove, wound up, and threw, hard—

The steaming pellet stopped suddenly three inches from the fat end of a hard-driven bat and began to go the other way. And go. And go. It

seemed to be headed for the red "EXIT" sign at the back of the Mezzanine. Bjoernefeld crossed home at a dogtrot with half the stands screaming murder, the other half screaming bloody murder. Pat Kelleher arrived at the chewing-gum sign a second ahead of the ball, but the Trojan slugger was safe on third by the time he'd picked it up.

Rip slammed the ball hard against his palm, but, way inside he felt tense and cold. Paul Horton was next on the line-up, and he was grinning cockily and wagging his bat like a man who expected to take a sight-seeing tour any minute. With a sudden surge of anger Rip pitched, straight for Mickey's glove.

Horton wasn't having any, and it was ticketed low for a ball. Rip forced himself to calm down. *Play it slow, boy. Keep it cool.* He put the next one in carefully; it went straight as a die and the Trojan laid into it; at the start of his swing, however, the ball did a little joggle and dropped. By the time it got to Mickey it was rolling.

"Strike one," the ump bawled. The crowd bawled, too, and Horton was looking at Rip with anger and disbelief. He pounded the plate and set his lips, but Rip wasn't fooled; he knew the man was reproaching himself for swatting, and had made up his mind that all of Rip's pitches were bad. He'd let this one go by.

Rip gave him a nice, slow one, strictly from sandlot softball. Anybody could have hit it—but Horton wouldn't believe it. He watched it suspiciously until it went past him, still drifting invitingly. The ump called it another strike.

Rip flexed his arm. Maybe the old soupbone wasn't so bad, after all. Just play it cool—

The next one, however, was high and outside for ball two; Horton was evidently convinced that the good one had been a fluke and he was going to ride it out. Rip began to feel nervous again and came out of his wind-up off-balance. Another ball. The stands were quiet now. With three and two on the batter, a man after

leading off third, and the score three-zero in the Trojan's favor, another run this early in the fifth would pretty well cinch matters.

Horton knew it as well as anyone else, and the temptation to ride the setup to glory overpowered his better judgment—he wanted the chance to run instead of walk it, and maybe make a chump of Rip in the process. Rip fed him a fast spinner and he slashed at it. The ball shot up and back for a foul. Mickey tore after it, but it lit in the second row of the stands.

Rip could feel the tension now. Mickey was back, signalling for another spinner, but Rip didn't know whether or not he could do it again. His control wasn't what it used to be. In dead silence he wound up, pointed his left heel at the press-box, and let fly.

"Baaaaaal Four!"

The galleries roared like a thousand frustrated tigers as Horton cocked his cap jauntily forward over his eyes and strolled to first. The game was in the bag. Before the Hornet dugout Sam Schaefer, dependable southpaw pitcher, was warming up.

HE DIDN'T want to see Jane, but he'd already made the date before the game. A guy couldn't stand up his fiancée just because he was batting near .013 and had just pitched the next thing to an all-hit game. Even if there was some doubt about the fiancée part of it.

She was sitting at their usual table in the Marlboro, sipping a sidecar and looking the half-million dollars she had behind her. She was as beautiful as ever, but somehow Rip didn't feel the old heady excitement. The game evidently had taken even more of the heart out of him than he'd suspected.

"Hello," she said. "You're early, for once."

"We were up the first half of the ninth," he said, sitting down. "After I popped out, I didn't hang around waiting to be told I wouldn't be needed in the box."

She smiled, but the smile was very cool. "That was thoughtful of you, Rip," she said. "You don't seem to be doing very well, though, do you?"

"No."

The waiter came and she let it drop there while he ordered, but he knew he hadn't heard the last of it. When it came to baseball Jane and her old man had the same attitude: "It's damn silly," Mr. Crane had exploded. "What's the sense of quitting a good job to chase a little ball around and around? If it were swimming I could understand it; that's a real sport. But you should have outgrown your baseball days, Rip. I don't think you realize what a good opportunity you had in that job."

"I realized it," Rip had said. "But I'm no good at business, Mr. Crane, and I can't see trying to cram myself into a pigeon hole. I played good ball before the war. I'll leave the swimming to Jane."

It hadn't turned out to be that easy, though. Old man Crane had his heart set on seeing Jane a great swimmer, as he had; and Rip knew uneasily that he couldn't offer much competition for Marvin Ellison, her current coach. Oh, Rip was all right, with good shoulders and a good crop of freckles and sandy hair. But next to Ellison's perfect swimmer's build and his smooth, dark good looks, he was a bit gawky.

"How's the swimming?" he asked, hoping to change the subject.

Where other people flushed, Jane just turned a little whiter under her the lovely mouth she had brushed on so carefully thinning over her plate. "Marvin thinks I have a good chance to top one fifteen on my back-make-up. "Going very well," she said, stroke. If I can beat that I'll make a good showing in the Women's Open." She gave him a level gray glance. "You don't fool me, Rip. You don't give a damn about swimming, and maybe you don't care much about me, either. You certainly seem to be backing away at top speed."

"Now, wait a minute—"

"Oh, maybe you don't realize it yourself," she said, shrugging. "But it won't take much more to make me think it's so. First of all you throw over a job Dad worked hard to get for you. Then you go back to baseball, a game where you're not exactly a ball of fire. Evidently money doesn't interest you."

"Sure it interests me," he grumbled. "But I don't much want to live off yours. And I wasn't even eating very well on the commissions I made on that job."

SHE PUT down her coffee spoon and began to tap a cigarette against her thumbnail. "So you went back to baseball, to be a ninth-rate sideswipe or buckboard or whatever it's called. It didn't seem to occur to you that unless you turned out to be plenty good at baseball, Dad probably wouldn't agree to our marriage, and that would mean he wouldn't give me the money he has in trust for me. I'd have to live on what you made."

"What's wrong with that? Millions of women live on their husband's earnings."

She shook her head impatiently. "Let's try to be grown-up about this, Rip. After all, it isn't everyone—"

Her voice stopped suddenly, and she stared over his shoulder. After a moment, she said in an amazingly frigid voice, "Why, there's Marvin. What a coincidence!"

Rip glanced over his shoulder. The suave tank-man was threading his way down the line of tables. With him was a familiar figure: Mary Ellen Timmins, whom Rip had squired to many a high-school dance back in Steubenville. She'd changed quite a bit.

"That's Ken Timmins' daughter," he volunteered. "He's the Hornet's manager—a fine guy."

"Oh?" Jane said, without inflection. "I see. That dress doesn't suit her face very well, does it?"

"Looks all right to me," Rip returned, shrugging. "Look Jane. I don't know exactly what's the trouble on the field. I'd been away a long time, and I'm not a short-stop as you seem to think; I'm a pitcher. If your arm gets stale, it takes time to limber it up. Ken thinks I'll be able to get back into shape. Most of the guys on the team think I'm a has-been. I can't tell you which of them is right. All I know is, I've got to give it a try."

"All right. If it means that much to you, go ahead and give it a try." She stuffed her cigarettes into her pocketbook. "Remember, while you're at it, that I think there are more important things in the world than playing games. I'm sick of trying to follow your twists and turns. If you ever grow up enough to realize that money is important—let me know."

"Double-talk," Rip said, more angrily than he had intended. "What you mean, if you mean anything, is that I'd better turn out to be a professional baseball man, Or Else. This is just the way I feel about it. I don't have to have money-bags dangled under my nose to convince me. Why should we quarrel about it?"

"I have no intention of quarrelling about it. I don't think it's worth it."

Her expression changed suddenly. It was evident that she knew she had stepped too far over the line. "Look at it my way," she said swiftly. "I'm used to a pretty good life, Rip. I guess I could struggle along with you if you wanted to make a success at throwing balls, but you don't seem to be very good at throwing balls, or hitting them either. I don't want to give up the kind of life I'm used to for nothing."

"Nothing?" said Rip. "All right. I'll see that you won't have to."

"Then you don't want to go through with it!"

"You seem pleased at the idea. Does Marvin have money?"

She stood up, her face rigid, her eyes blazing. "That's quite enough," she said quietly. "If you're going to be childish and jealous about it I can play the same way. I think it's

rather odd that you quit a job that insured our marriage, to join a team coached by a man from your home town who has a nice, cornmeal-pretty daughter."

Rip started to speak, but she didn't give him a chance. She put one hand over the other, and a split-second later his ring was tinkling across the table.

"If you want to give that back," she said, "you can let me know by quitting the Hornets." Her long, shapely legs swung her down the aisle toward the door. Rip watched her go, and so did nearly every other male in the Marlboro. Marvin Ellison was too busy talking to Mary Ellen Timmins to notice.

Mary Ellen was too busy watching Rip Gamble.

THE HORNETS had been a game and a half away from the top of their league when Rip had lost them the Trojan contest, but a 7-2, 5-4 double-header—without Rip—had put them back in the running again for the play-off. There was a sizable amount of gloom circulating about the club when Rip came back to Ken Timmins. The Trojans were a heavy team, specializing in hard slugging and hard running—and they had Paul Horton, who could pitch the pill in spirals. Also, they'd already made bumble-bees of the Hornets once before this season. The pennant seemed to be fluttering over Troy already.

Mary Ellen was in the office when Rip came in. She reached for his hand impulsively.

"Hello, Mutts."

"Hello, Stinky. Why didn't you come to see me? I heard you'd graced the Hornets with your presence, but I didn't even see you until that night at the Marlboro."

"Small wonder," Rip said. "I haven't been cutting much of a swathe lately."

"Urrhum," Ken Timmins said from his desk. "What's on your mind Rip?"

"The play-off," Rip said. "I've got to be in it, Ken."

Timmins doodled abstractedly on the pad before him. "We need that pennant, Rip. Are you sure you're up to it?"

"I don't know. If I'm not, I've got to go back to selling underwear. I think maybe I'd rather play baseball."

"Why not, Dad?" Mary Ellen said.

Ken's silver head cocked quizzically. "I could think of nine good reasons if I needed them," he said. "But I don't. I think it's up to Rip. Selling underwear doesn't sound very exciting—but old man Crane is the underwear king, and Jane Crane is worth a little sacrifice." He looked up suddenly, his electric-blue eyes sending a lighting bolt at Rip. "Isn't that so?"

"I thought it was so," Rip said steadily. "If I can play baseball I can still have Jane and skip the underwear. I could even skip Jane."

"Attaboy, Stinky," Mary Ellen cheered softly. He smiled at her.

"What I want to do," he said, "is play. I know I stank on the last Trojan game. Maybe I'm too old and stale to pitch any more. Maybe I'm not. I'd like the chance."

"All right," Ken Timmins said. "You can start, Rip. I like you, and I remember some games you took over back in Steubenville. *But I want that pennant.* If you throw wild to the Trojans in the first innings, I'll be sorry, but I'll put Sam Schaefer in all the same—for good."

And there's more than just that to it, Rip. You're pushing the time when the best would be leaving baseball. I'd like to see you stick around with us a coach—but I can't swing that unless you retire as a winner."

Rip nodded slowly. "That's all right with me, Ken. If I mess up this time I won't have to be told to go. I don't want to have bats for brains all my life."

Mary Ellen said, "I don't see why not."

IN THE practice field Ken Timmins sometimes looked as if he regretted his decision. Rip was tied into six different kinds of knots. If

Ken knew the reason, he kept his own counsel; nobody else on the Hornets gave a damn for the reason, one way or the other. All the men cared about was the results, and they resented them. As far as they could see, with Rip it was strictly Situation Normal—All Fouled Up. It didn't exactly improve the team's morale.

Rip knew it, but there was nothing he could do about it. The fact that most of the trouble was in his own mind didn't make it any less real, but it made it harder to handle. He pitched grimly, taking it easy on his arm and working on placement, and did as he was told, but he knew he wasn't showing up very well. The irony on the situation struck him forcefully, and he knew that most of the men would have hooted with disbelief or contempt had they known what was interfering with his ball game.

It was philosophy, for all that Rip had never read a line of the great philosophers. It was a question of values, and it loused up his game. The names of Jeremy Bentham and Epicurus would have been just names to Rip, but he hung suspended between the two men; they were between him and the ball.

There was money to be considered. Maybe it was everything despite the proverbs; it was a cinch Rip could use a sizable wad of it. Some days he was convinced that that was the answer, and on those days he worked coldly and efficiently, doing his best, but considering his strength for the play-off. Rigidly driving out any nonsense about team spirit and the intrinsic value of the pennant, he tried to be a cog in the machine—a good cog, that does its job without knowing or caring what the machine itself does.

But Rip was a baseball player; baseball was in him, part of him. Underneath was the feeling that he wouldn't be happy out of it, no matter how well off he might be financially. Sooner or later the game would drive out his caution and calculation; he'd catch himself throwing himself up in the air at the ball,

swinging with every ounce of steam he could muster, running like a man possessed—like a man enjoying himself. And then he'd think what a dope he was, shortening his already short day in the game instead of playing it smart, conserving what was left of his arm. As an un-brilliant but dependable pitcher he might last for a few seasons and make a healthy wad of dough—enough to satisfy Jane and her father. One all-out game and his arm could be ruined for keeps.

The others didn't know what Rip's two poles might be, but they could see him plunging, pendulum-wise and it made them wary. They saw him erratic, undependable, impossible to figure out. Some days he did nothing that wasn't required of him; others, he tried to do the impossible every five minutes. Either he was a clock-watcher who didn't give a damn for the team—or else he was trying to be the whole team. Either way, it wasn't good ball.

Money or the game. That was the choice, Rip knew. If he chose money, Jane went with it. If he didn't—but he had enough trouble without speculating about that. Besides, money counted, didn't it? What sense was there in playing for the game? No matter what the outcome, the game forgot you while you were still a young man by any reasonable standards. You gave it your youth and it gave you a kick in the teeth when your youth was gone. Even the break Timmins offered him wouldn't amount to much in the light of the dough he could make by playing it smart. Better make it give you a start on something else while you had the chance.

Only Rip wasn't clear on this something else business, outside of Jane herself.

But money was winning, for the voice in Rip's heart, the voice that whispered, "Your last game, chum", had to be denied. He'd hold back, play it safe, push his time. And the last few days of practice, Rip settled far enough into the cold game to begin to be dependable again. Dependable, but never great.

If Ken Timmins saw any of this in Rip's playing and in his face, he mentioned it to no-one. That was Ken's way. He had made a promise, and he'd deliver without complaint.

A few of the Hornets were less polite.

THE DAY OF the clash with the Trojans it was raining gently but determinedly, and the game was called. For the succeeding two days after that it slackened to a drizzle, then to a maddening mist. Then came Saturday again. It was hot and clear, but the postponement had done damage to the Hornet's temper. It was tense in the locker room. The men grumbled to each other, and two sporadic outbursts almost led to fights.

Neither of these near misses involved Rip, however, for the simple reason that nobody was speaking to him.

That was all right with Rip. He had stopped worrying, but it had dried up something in him and left him nothing extra for sociability. He climbed out of the dugout ahead of the rest and ran in place a few experimental steps. The ground was still squishy from its recent soaking, but perhaps the sun would take care of that before the game was too far along.

The stands were jammed right up to the rafters. Several fans ensconced in seats above the dugout recognized him at the same time, and those around them picked up their jeering.

"There's Gamble, the Walk-'Em King!"

"Hey, Rip, didja bring ya pea-shooter?"

"What side ya playin' on, Rip? Ya wearin' th' wrong shoit!"

Rip stopped dancing up and down and went back into the dugout. Most of the others were out now. They made a point of not noticing him—all but Bud Martinson and Ken Timmins. Both men, young and old, were looking at him with the same expression—anxiety and—was it pity? Rip

shrugged angrily and planted himself on the bench.

The mob groaned and laughed when the p. a. system reading off the starting line-ups got to Rip's name. Ken Timmins got the top claw on the bat and the Trojans trooped confidently out onto the field. On the mound, Horton went through his usual ritual of dropping the ball when it was tossed to him, stepping on his own fingers and kicking the pill away, when he bent to pick it up, and chasing it in a short circle back to the mound. It was old stuff, but the fans ate it up. It was a sort of invetted brag—Horton was sure enough to play the boob, knowing he'd have the game in his hand from the first real pitch.

Pat Kelleher picked up the first bat that came to hand and stashed himself solidly beside the plate. He was big, though he could run like a demon when he wanted to; any ball he landed on didn't wait for apologies, and he didn't wait to apologize to it. Pat was a slugger on the right balls.

Horton had no intention of giving him any right balls. The first one came in fast and deceptively high; it was perfect except for being slightly inside, and it travelled too fast to spot that. Pat cut into it with all his might. The bat pushed some air out of its way and it plopped a little polite thank-you in the catcher's mitt.

Pat put the bat back on his shoulder and set his lips. He was still in approximately this position when the next one went by for another strike, went by so fast even the catcher missed it. On the next one Pat popped the ball straight up in the air, and when it came down the Trojans had had won their first out.

When Ed Penn started out it looked like the second one was on the way, and Horton on his way to a no-hitter. He gave Ed one ball and two strikes, and then Ed saw one he liked and crossed the sack to get it. It dribbled down the line toward first, and Ed passed it halfway for a single.

"Go run that one around, Rip," Bud

Martinson said. "Start another flyin' saucer scare."

If he was trying to get the Hornets to talk it up, he failed. Rip selected a bat from the row of post-holes and walked out. The stands began to groan again in mock agony. Out on the field, Horton dusted the ball, straightened, and grinned at him mockingly.

Rip ignored the grin and balanced his hickory. Horton was a pitcher, and he ought to know his pitchers. The first one would probably be razzle-dazzle.

It was. Rip felt the breeze fan past his nose as the horseside came by, high and inside and apparently jet-propelled.

"Ball One!"

Rip grinned. The ump hollered that like he expected more. He was probably wrong.

HORTON WOUND up and eased the next one over. On first, Ed saw it leave his hand and left the bag for points west. Rip had seen him taking his lead-off and watched the ball tensely. It seemed to take an eternity to float toward him. *Take it easy. This is a pip.*

Was the damned thing never going to arrive? He held on until the last minute and then swung, nearly throwing himself out of the park. The ball arrived over the plate a split second later, almost long enough for him to whop it again.

The bleachers were rocking and throwing things, mostly hats. If that wasn't the slowest ball in history, the slowest one must still be on its way. Rip shot a glance at second. At least, it had given Ed time enough to make it.

Horton dusted the ball again, glanced sidewise at Ed, and then, without even a shadow of a wind-up hurled the pellet straight at Rip's head. He was caught flat-footed. Rattled, he started to duck, did a double-take, and slugged recklessly. It seemed almost the same instant that Ed Penn was called out at third.

The crowd booted Rip off the field enthusiastically. Then from the north

end of the stands a wave of cheering for Paul Horton stormed around the field. Grimly Rip realized that he had it coming; the fast ball had been ■ spectacularly fast ■ the other had been lazy.

Paul had out-pitched him before, but this looked like the star act of the season.

Bud Martinson was up next, but Bud was pitcher-bait, and no match for ■ sinker. But Paul must have been relaxing. He gave Bud two balls, and the third peg was the straight goods; Bud lammed it, slung his bat, and took off.

Bjoernefeld bagged it neatly for the third out, and the Trojans charged for their dugout, whooping and pounding each other on the back.

As far as Rip was concerned, the game was still being played cold, but when he walked toward the mound, it was as if there was ■ big red X scrawled over it. Ed had spoiled Paul's no-hitter. Rip knew, calculation or no calculation, he was walking as close to his all-hitter as he would ever walk, on the last game he had in him. He couldn't kid himself any further now, and it was not ■ nice feeling.

The Trojan line-up began with Jumpy Tefler, a man who had been hit by ■ pitched ball in his rookie days, and was still leery of an inside curve. Rip juggled the pill, trying to get some feeling into his numb arms. Somehow he couldn't rid himself of the notion that he had eleven fingers.

Behind him, Bud was muttering ■ fast patter, just a series of encouraging sounds that made no sense. Bud was being Team Spirit all over the place, but the team wasn't having any. Rip clenched his teeth, tied himself into a granny, and uncoiled.

It was good. It started out straight, and half way along began to curve implacably toward Jumpy's chest. The Trojan eyed it nervously, and leaned away from it. Mickey reached for it and fired it back, surprise and satisfaction battling on his face.

It was supposed to be a cold game, despite what he knew, but the re-

action was strong. In sheer relief Rip began to sweat all over, and the salt stung in his eyes. Bud's chanting rang monotonously in his ears. Almost mechanically, he shifted to a thumb grip and fed in a slow twister. The bolus had scarcely left his hand when he realized what he'd done. Nothing made Telfer jump but a fast ball or a close one; on slow balls, no matter how erratic, he was tops in the league on placement.

He placed it. The spin cut down his distance, but the hole he had picked out in center field was plenty big, and when the ball grounded and bounced just past Pat's pounding gunboats, it skittered sidewise toward the newsreel men like a drunken crab. Jumpy slid for second and made it four feet ahead of the ball.

There goes my no-hitter, too. What a laugh.

A week's moisture was steaming heavily up out of the trodden earth in dancing waves. Rip's uniform was soaked, and over the press-box the sun flared pitilessly in his face. It took him a moment to recognize the next batter and when he did he could remember nothing about the man, except that he was a southpaw. He tried to remember Sam Schaefer's batting weakness, but he could think of nothing but strength—and this bird was heavy. Rip heaved for an outside, and almost made it.

The crack of the bat was not very noisy, but it had distance in it. The Trojan had some distance of his own; he cleated second at nearly the same moment that Telfer thundered under Mickey's nose. First run, first inning for the Trojans—and no outs!

Rip took time out to yank the bandanna from his pocket and mop his face and neck. *If this is a cool game, they must have it easy in hell.* And underneath was that something he had been trying to keep down, that urge to play with his heart. He thought of Jane and her cool beauty and her cool fortune.

When he looked again, the archdemon was trying a club for size. Horton had no strategy for the batting order; he let it come as it would and

depended upon Rip for the clowning from here on out.

Rip licked his lips and threw. Somehow it rose by, shoulder-high, a bonanza for with a man with dreams of home runs.

"Strike!"

It was no compliment—as usual, Paul had expected sandlot tossing. If anyone were to blame for the strike, Rip knew that the batter himself was the best candidate. Even his good pitches were bad baseball, he thought bitterly. Bad baseball. Bad. Not even smart, not even cold efficiency.

The sweat was running into his eyes again and his arms felt rubbery. The next one was all right in his hand, but it wobbled away from him as if a woman had thrown it. Paul Horton stepped into it gleefully and it soared in a long line drive over center field.

Out of the corner of his eye Rip could see Sam Schaefer dancing on the spongy turf before the dugout.

RIP KNEW his chances of finishing the second would be low, as he strode to the bench after sheer luck had brought him through the first without anything worse than the single run. Two more hits were credited to the Trojans; but he'd used his head with two on, flung a duster at the batman and Mickey'd scooped it quick, as the Trojan ducked, and bulletted it out to catch Horton offbase. But Rip knew how it looked to the stands, and how it must to him. No game could be cold enough to carry a corpse. It was hard for him not to hear the sarcastic war cry still echoing: "R. I. P. Bury the dead!" Rip slumped on the bench, looked up as a hand fell on his shoulder.

"Nice pitchin', Rip! Smooth a glass."

"Yeah," Rip said.

Bud heard the word but not the tone. "Looks good to me," he prattled. "Old Horton got his no-hitter killed early, and you made him look like a sucker with that duster-play. I seen his girl in the stands. Yours here, Rip?"

(Continued On Page 95)

RED FOR *Courage*

By Ted Stratton

A Complete Novelet

They called him Handsome, thought he was yellow, afraid of hurting his pretty face. But no one knew what was behind Ken Whiting's reluctance to plunge into the line.

∞ 1 ∞

THE HOT October sun glared down on the gridiron hemmed in by the packed, high-tiered stands. On the fifty-yard line a bespectacled old grad with a fat paunch cupped hands around his mouth and bellowed hoarsely: "Hold 'em, Raiders!"

The visiting B. U. team, resplendent in silver-and-blue, ran from the huddle and settled in place on the Red Raiders fifteen-yard line, the nearest they had come to a touchdown. Opposite them, Ken Whiting shifted a yard closer at left wing against the Z-offense.

"A smash," he thought, trying to out-guess the quarterback, and toed in for a better angled cut.

On the snapback, the Raider line butted the lighter line. Cornish, the close spin-back, wheeled, then flicked a short lateral to halfback Devlin, who high-tailed into the flat. Blockers swarmed laterally as Ken Whiting slid across the scrimmage line. He took the savage shock of the first blocker with his hands, and side-stepping, worked in deeper to force Devlin inside.

The halfback delayed a cut until the second blocker hurled himself. Ken managed to spin loose, stepped closer to the sideline. Trapped, Devlin reversed the field and cut in sharply. At the line, he sharpened the cut, fled through the unprotected bucket. Teammates had sifted through the charging Raider line.

They carried Devlin on a long diagonal run to the three-yard line where Buzz Waring, the Raider safety, made the save. The tiny contingent of B. U. followers leosed a cheer at such an unexpected turn of events.

A red-shirted sub charged in from the Raider bench and the umpire thumbed Ken from the game. A mild cheer accompanied him to the bench where Dan Taylor, the coach, met him and griped: "Didn't I tell you to crash on sweeps?"

"But Devlin had swung too deep," Ken protested.

"When I tell you to crash, you crash!"

Crisply barked signals on the field. Ken turned in time to see Cornish, running with pumping knee action, slam through the congested middle to score. That broke the scoreless tie, shoved B. U. ahead in the third quarter, a totally unexpected development. The B. U. kicker missed the easy point try and the Raiders trailed 6-0.

Century Wayne gobbled up the B. U. kickoff and scooted back to the thirty-yard line. Against the Raider's loose T-offense, the B. U. line angled in and piled up fullback Kinnard on a delayed buck. Then Mel Stein, right half, cross-bucked and ran into a pileup.

"Whiting!" Taylor bellowed, and Ken reported on the run.

"Crossover pass," Dan snapped. "You gave 'em one touchdown. See if you can get it back."

Ken started off, heard Dan's parting shot: "Don't get yourself hurt in there!"

Ken could have
made it himself,
but he passed . . .



Ignoring the sarcasm, he raced in with one hand upraised to halt the clock. Voght, a rookie end, departed and Ken stepped into the huddle. Bendine, towering tackle, said: "Oh, it's Handsome in again."

"Play with us," Ken snapped, and Waring asked: "What's the orders?"

"33-pass to loosen 'em up."

"Roll, for God's sake!" Waring pleaded. "We should be thirty points ahead, you lugs."

ON THIRD down with nine yards to gain, the B. U. line spread wider. The right tackle planted himself in front of Ken. On the snap,

Ken knew how to avoid the fore-arm shiver to his shoulders. A lifted left elbow blocked the hand-blow, and he sidestepped into the clear.

Swinging downfield, he headed directly for the wingback, faked to the outside, and cut into the invitingly open bucket. Buck Pallison, right end, crossed over deep to pull the B. U. safety off Ken's trail. Ken swerved behind Pallison, and safely behind the defending left wingback he coasted, glanced back.

Well-protected, Buzz Waring delayed the heave. When the ball came, it was well out ahead. Ken overtook it with a burst of speed, picked it off

the hook where Waring had hung it. Devlin at safety had a chance to angle in to the sideline and head Ken off. Their paths converged near the five-yard line and Ken realized he had two moves. Devlin timed his dive, launched his body.

Only a fraction-second for Ken to make his choice. Drive through and trust to luck or—instinctively Ken braked to a stop. Devlin slid harmlessly past, blocked the way. Ken cut around, but the delay had been just enough for the B. U. wingback to come up fast and bowl Ken over on the two-yard line.

Teammates thundered up and Bendine roared: "Two little yards and you didn't make it!"

And then Voght charged in again and the umpire thumbed Ken out. A ringing cheer rewarded the catch and run. Dan Taylor, hands on hips, shouted: "Five yards from the line and you don't know enough to dive! You could a-run through Devlin and scored!"

"He had me blocked off," Ken said, knowing that Dan wouldn't accept the explanation. "We'll score easy."

Dan scowled. "Yeah, yeah, we'll score! Only you gave 'em one t. d. and you should have got it back. Go take a shower."

Ken trotted towards the gym. That was Dan Taylor, he thought. Whole hog. Wanted the cream and the skim milk, too. Behind him, a roaring Chenango cheer. He turned, saw the Raiders leaping and dancing, and knew the score had been knotted. They could go ahead now because Frinkle, kicking ace, hadn't missed a point-try in two seasons.

But that didn't solve his problem. Dan was getting too hard to please. No matter what Ken did, Dan was always on top of him with, "Drive harder", or "Crash, crash, and unhinge 'em!" What made the situation worse was that Ken had won the Aggie game with a long run after a pass and now had set up an easy score against B. U.

He entered the silent, dim lockers, undressed slowly and showered alone. At intervals, muffled cheers with Chenango's on the end, penetrated the

stillness. Just as he finished dressing, Curley Payson limped in. "How's it going?" Ken wanted to know.

"A snap after you loosened 'em up with that run," Payson said. "Kinard scored twice and Wayne just got loose for another."

"You get hit bad?"

"Only a kicked muscle. Say if you —" Payson stopped, and his hard eyes bored into Ken. Then he passed on and slumped down on the bench. Ken did not bother to return to the stadium.

LATER THAT night, he called for his "date", Dot McIlroy, a blonde Senior, and they went out to the Lake for the dance. "That was a nice pass catch and run," Dot said, when they were dancing.

"Dan didn't seem to think so," Ken said moodily.

"Oh, Dan. Nothing can satisfy him. He knew we would win and he sent you in to save you for the Syracuse game."

Saving me for the Syracuseans—or the bench, Ken thought. But why bench him because Devlin had got loose in the Raider secondary? To humble him before the partisan crowd? What had he done that was wrong? One of the backers up should have nailed Devlin when he had cut back, but no such luck. There seemed one answer. So far, Ken had refused to slam into opponents like a jeep running downhill.

Somebody tapped Ken on the shoulder. Bendine, the grinning right tackle, said: "Gonna borrow the prettiest coed in the place, Handsome." They danced off and Ken picked his way through the packed dancers. There had been a sneer in Bendine's voice, "Handsome," a sort of ironical nick-name had been Bendin's idea the second week of practice.

When he recovered Dot later, she said: "Don't look so gloomy, Ken. That hulk can't offer you much competition."

"He doesn't worry me."

She glanced sharply up at him. "Somebody tell you that he and I used to—that is, last June he took me to the Prom."

"He still doesn't worry me," Ken repeated. It couldn't have been a very torrid romance, he thought. Not when he remembered how easily the two of them had gravitated together as soon as they had met in September. But it could explain Bendine's needling manner on and off the gridiron.

§ 2 §

AN OFF-DAY on Monday, but Tuesday afternoon found Ken at the door that said PRIVATE in gilt letters. He opened the door, pushed inside, closed it quietly. He waited a moment inside the office over the Chenango College lockers. A wind crawled through the opened window and spiced the air with the fragrance of burning leaves.

Ken said to the man behind the desk: "You wanted to see me before practice?"

Dan Taylor glanced up, leaned back in the swivel chair, and inventoried Ken. A tall young man with the wide shoulders and tapering hips of a co-ordinated athlete. Close-clipped black hair, lean face, a straight almost too perfectly molded nose. "Handsome", according to Bendine, and it was an apt description. Ken wore a casual jacket of lightweight tweed, soft yellow shirt open at the throat, and gabardine trousers with knife-edge creases.

"You just step off a page in Esquire?" Dan wanted to know, and his face registered disapproval.

"I like smart clothes," Ken said easily, wondering why Dan had sent for him.

"Why don't you dress like the rest of the men?"

"I don't like sloppy clothes."

Dan's tone hardened. "Maybe clothes make the man, but I judge men on a different basis, Whiting. They told me you once played end at Gonzago College before the war. You got mustered out on the West Coast, came East, and got a job in Riker Best's brokerage office. Why'd you decide to return to college?"

"Mr. Best suggested that I needed

to brush up on economics and finance"

"You know he is a Chenango grad?"

Ken nodded and Dan continued: "Did Best tell you we met this summer and I told him we'd have a pretty good team this fall if he could rustle me a good end?"

"That's news," Ken admitted.

"So it's a simple a spin-back. You see what was in Best's mind?"

"You're suggesting he sent me here just to play end?"

"Hell, don't be so dumb!" Dan exploded, and hammered the desk with a pudgy fist. "Whiting, any guy that Best takes a fancy to is set for life, particularly if he played good football for Chenango."

"I'm beginning to see a great light that I don't like," Ken said.

Dan jumped up, rounded the desk, and faced Ken. A squat square-jawed man with an explosive temper. "That pretty face—you afraid you might get it smashed eh?"

IT WAS the wrong approach. If Dan had talked easily, man-to-man, Ken would have opened up to him. But when Dan began to punctuate his words with a jabbing finger into the yellow shirt, Ken turned stubborn. Not for anything would he tell Dan Taylor his problem.

"You can't take a hard knock," Dan continued, jabbing with the finger. "You don't want that matinee face of yours scratched!"

Ken braced his body. "Don't finger me," he warned.

"They're saying you lack guts, Whiting!"

"Who says that?"

Suddenly, Dan cooled off, but it was too late. "Whiting," he pleaded, "here's my setup this fall. I got nothing but young, inexperienced ends except Buck Pallison and he can't catch passes with a basket. In rough going like the B. U. game, our T-passes have to click to unsnag the running game. So you can catch passes. Why can't you block harder? Why can't you dive through a tackler and score? Why don't you mix it up like the rest of the team?"

"You've no kick," Ken countered.

"I caught passes and we won two games. Isn't that enough?"

"But Syracuse is tough! Only bone-smashing play can lick 'em. Now you've forced me to give you a lab test this afternoon, Whiting."

"Lab test?" Ken asked curiously.

"Test you in the fires of a blood-and-guts scrimmage to see if you can take it." Dan whirled, fired a final blast over one broad shoulder. "Take a tip, Whiting. Burn that yellow shirt. Red is the color of guts, like the Raider colors! Forget your nice manners or ride the bench from now on. Yeah, and remember that Riker Best is flying up for the Syracuse game. If you want to hang on to that easy job—" Dan let the threat dangle.

"So today I'm supposed to die for dear old Riker Best & Company," Ken murmured, and walked to the door.

"Burn that yellow shirt!"

"It cost seven dollars," Ken said quietly, and heading downstairs, entered the locker room.

Men loafed around in the usual state of pre-game dress and nakedness. As Ken passed through to his locker, occasionally a man spoke casually. Ken answered absently, his mind on Dan Taylor's words. So Riker Best, Chenango '23, had sent him to Chenango simply to play football! He'd been a fool not to have known that earlier.

"In a brokerage office," Best had said back in New York, "a man has to know finance thoroughly. Go back to Chenango for a term and study under Doc Barkinghaus. If you'd like to play some football up there, that's okay. I'll give you a note to Dan Taylor and—"

It seemed a strange way to secure a job. Probably hundreds of football stars before him had nailed down lucrative vocations in the same manner. Probably thousands more would find life-sinecures the same way if old grads continued to act like sophomores. But Ken didn't like the idea. He had been tricked into matriculating at Chenango. Football was now a business proposition. Make a success of football and you've got a good

job, Whiting. Fail—it was professional athletics.

Carefully, he hung the smart clothes inside the smelly steel locker and began to dress in the snappy, suddenly hateful red regimentals. Of course, he could quit the game, hand in his uniform. But that wouldn't solve his present problem or his future.

Except for Dot McIlroy, he had been lonesome at Chenango. With the football squad, he had been somewhat of an outsider. At first, he had figured this was because he was older than most of the men, but now Dan Taylor had offered another answer. "They're saying you lack guts, Whiting," Dan had said. But it wasn't a question of guts, not when he remembered the air-hours he'd spent under MacArthur. It was a different problem, one that he hadn't solved yet, but one that he would have to solve soon or quit football.

HE LACED on the soft kangaroo shoes, stood up, slim-hipped and wide-shouldered inside the tight, fitted uniform. As he headed outside, he passed the wall mirror by the door, stopped and studied the smooth lines of his face. Instinctively, one hand lifted to stroke the perfectly proportioned nose.

Behind him, someone said: "Checking up on the beautiful mug?"

Ken faced Bendine. Twice he'd played Bendine in scrimmage and the big fellow had played Dan Taylor's aggressive, rough game up to the hilt. There had been anger in Bendine's play. Because of Dot McIlroy?

Muscles bunched across his stomach and Ken said lightly: "Just making sure the nose is in place."

"Think a lot of that nose, Hand-some?" Bendine scoffed.

"It's the only one I've got."

"Maybe you're too handsome for this rough game!" Bendine posed with huge hands on his hips, jaw stuck out. "Funny you're so keen about that nose. Thinking of getting a movie contract, pretty boy?"

A chill ran along Ken's spine. Bendine was asking for trouble. Offering the sort of words that he met with a

punch on the nose. On the nose, Ken thought, and curbed his anger.

He sensed the sudden silence. Men had stopped dressing, listened, waited for developments. When Bendine said, "You won't run away from me today," somebody snickered.

"I don't run away from anybody," he said.

"Yeah? The way you play we're gonna start calling you our *backward* end. Catch on Handsome?"

A laugh rippled around the room. Ken stared up at Bendine's grinning face, the brawny shoulders, the thick biceps rippling inside the tight jersey. In a way it was silly. A grown man looking for a fight in the lockers, like little boys on the playground. And yet, the words demanded strong action.

"You talk a tough game," Ken said. and wheeling, stalked out.

Bendine called out loudly, "Knew the guy don't have it," and laughter followed Ken along the corridor. He went out, banged the door savagely. He knew what he should have done back there—smacked Bendine's grinning face, risked a fight. Punched and taken punches. If Bendine had been the better man, why, jump off the floor and ask for more punishment. Then, bleeding and battered, the men would agree that he had guts.

Yet he had not been able to force himself into a fist fight with Bendine. Did a man have to fight to prove he had courage? Did he have to batter himself into a state of insensibility on the gridiron—or be called gutless? "Postponing the inevitable showdown," he thought bitterly. "But next time—"

The squad went into the daily routine on the dummies. Ken had hit the dummies twice when he met Bendine. The big tackle crossed in front of him as he crouched on the cinder path waiting his turn to smack the sawdust-and-canvas men. Ken delayed, then lunged forward, eyes intent on the target.

Bendine slowed, dragged one foot. Ken tripped, tumbled earthward. Instinctively, he lifted his chin to keep his face off the cinders. Flat palms partly cushioned the fall, but his chin

and hands picked up plenty of cinders before he braked to a stop. He climbed up slowly, trembling, close to the yawning edge of fear. If his face had struck that cinder path—

"Sort of an accident," Bendine said, and laughed.

Men waited to see what would happen. Would Whiting take this the way he had taken Bendine's words in the locker room?

"You've got big feet," Ken said coldly, and stifling his anger, turned away. Fingernails bit into the flesh of his palms. He crouched, the silence thick and accusing about him, then drove off. He hit hard. The ropes sang through the pulleys and the sawdust man thudded into the pits with Ken topside. "Should have smacked that dummy Bendine like this," he thought.

It had been a hard, clean tackle, but Dan Taylor averted his face and snapped: "More drive, Whiting."

KEN STALKED to the end of the line. Not a man glanced at him. Awaiting his turn, Mel Stein stood ahead of Ken. Stein turned, leveled a cool stare and asked quietly: "A point of information, fellow. Do they fly differently under MacArthur?"

Face expressionless, eyes depthless, Stein turned a broad back so Ken faced the white numerals 19. There could be no mistaking the implied accusation. Mel had flown in the European command along with Kinard, the bruising fullback on the Raiders.

Suddenly, Ken felt the impulse to shout out his troubles, to tell them the explanation of his conduct, to win back their respect. Just as quickly he braked the hot words, drew deeper within himself. It's what I know that counts, he decided. So they could think what they chose. Why, it took courage for him to climb into a uniform and risk football practice.

Dan Taylor led the way to the gridiron, snapped: "A blood-and-guts scrimmage." He selected a tentative varsity. Colgrave and Bendine at the tackles; Quigg and Curley Payson at guard; Adelson, a sixty-minute

scrapper at the pivot post; at the ends, Buck Pallison who couldn't catch passes, and Voght, the rookie with nothing but fight in his tough system.

Two shifty, fleet halfbacks in Century Wayne and Mel Stein; a hard-hitting fullback in Kinnard; lastly, a smart, accurate forward passing T-quarterback, Buzz Waring. Dan rattled off a scrub team, told Ken casually: "Try left end on defense." A murmur ran around the squad. Ken had started the Aggie and B. U. games.

The scrubs donned thin, white practice jerseys to camouflage the red. Men helped one another yank the tails down, shove them inside the shell pants, but Ken had to wriggle his own in place. Bogg, the assistant coach, told the scrubs: "Make like you're tough a Syracuse. We'll use a five-man, tight-spaced line like we think Syracuse will use against us. Ends wide and a yard deep." Bogg turned to Ken, growled: "No fancy-Dan stuff. Come in fast and crash. Get it, crash! Skibben, you and Clark, play shallow backerups and—"

Ken stopped listening. He didn't like the type of end play that the coaches demanded. Crashing ends, he had learned at Gonzago, grounded an end like a cracked-up plane. Spike Horgan, his old coach, had always warned: "An end hems in the attack, first. So keep the feet and keep shoving and working in deeper." That was the kind of end play that Ken knew. Besides, it was the correct way to avoid the savage contacts that Dan encouraged on the Raiders.

Within the varsity huddle, Dan said: "We're gonna polish up our right-handed attack. Blot out that left end! If it takes two men, get him out of there, but good."

Kinnard drawled: "We playing the scrubs or Whiting?"

"These Air Corps jerks!" Bendine jeered.

Kinnard grabbed a fistful of Bendine's jersey. "I rode a plane. You want to make something of that?"

"I don't mean you."

"Cut the comic act," Dan inter-

rupted, and Kinnard drawled: "This jerk is asking to have fewer teeth."

THE VARSITY deployed. On the third count, Stein whirled, ghosted into the right flat to draw the wingback wide. Ken drifted wider, poised. Kinnard faked left, wheeled, and surged after Stein to draw Ken's attention. Ken slid forward. There came Quigg from the inside, his trigger sights squarely on Ken. Quigg lowered his shoulders and Ken set himself, stiff-armed. Weight and momentum forced him back.

Curley Payson led Century Wayne up the inside alley vacated by Ken. Ken sidestepped Quigg's bulky body, trailed the play. A scrub backerup fended off Payson's bad-angle block and tackled. Ken came on to top Wayne, and hold the gain to three yards.

Bogg advanced on Ken. "Didn't I tell you to crash?"

"And get buried," Ken protested. "Kinnard and Stein were loose in the flat and I had to—"

"You'll crash next time!"

Again Stein in motion before the snap. He cut in sharply, hurled himself at Ken from the blind-spot blocking angle. Ken had sensed the maneuver, slid around Stein easily. Drifting, he raced in and to the outside. Kinnard lunged, but Ken was going backward. There came Wayne behind Quigg. Ken retreated, pivoting and dancing to slow the play. Near the sideline, Wayne cut back, but a scrub backerup nailed him for a yard loss.

Day Taylor pounced on Quigg. "Block him out, damn you!"

"He back-pedalled," Quigg protested, and glared at Ken.

"Run him up into the stands!"

As Ken walked back, Stein drifted past. "How'd you figure I was to cut you down?"

"You ran slower in motion."

Stein nodded. Kinnard bucked through center for eleven yards. On the next play, Bogg shoved Ken across the line as Stein moved into the flat. "Crash!" Bogg bellowed.

Ken regained his balance, glanced

up. Waring had slung a low, under-hand lateral to Stein coasting. Ken intercepted the ball, took off fast. He could have scored easily, but he turned and flung the ball to Adelson.

"Any giveaway that time?" Stein asked anxiously.

"No."

Kinnard bucked to the left for seven long yards. Again the Varsity returned to the right-handed attack against Ken. A smash at tackle. Kinnard and Mel Stein aimed at Ken. He lowered his shoulders, set his feet wide and—Bogg planted a cleated shoe against Ken's rump, shoved. Ken jerked erect. Stein hit him amidships with a billy-goat block. The air rushed from Ken's lungs and he blacked out.

He tried to sit up, but the Chenango trainer held him down. "Easy, that seems to be the way you always play it. Feel any better?"

Ken's hand stroked his nose. That was all right and he was beginning to feel better. "Cripes," the trainer said, moving off, "all you pretty boys think about is your mugs."

A sub had replaced Ken. He walked to the bench, sat down. The Varsity made hash out of the scrubs with a savage, right-handed running attack. They shifted to passes, but Pallison dropped a couple and Voght hadn't yet learned how to elude defenders.

Scrimmage ended. Bogg sent the bench-warmers for a mile tour of the grounds. He paused in front of Ken, jeered: "That's the first hard contact for you since September first, Whiting, and it finished you off! Want me to send for the ambulance?"

Wordlessly, Ken turned away and followed the jogging scrubs. He had failed the blood-and-guts scrimmage. Yet, exactly what had the varsity gained against him with the right-handed attack? Nothing, and he could have scored one touchdown.

Slamming the middle or the left side, the varsity had run for the good yards. The scrimmage re-inforced Ken's football knowledge. Crash, and they made hash of you. But delay, fight off the interference, and that paid off. If he got into another game,

Ken decided, Dan Taylor or no Dan Taylor, he'd play his own game.

3

KEN SHED the tweed jacket, tossed it carelessly on the leather divan in his room. On the desk, lay an unopened letter from his mother in Frisco. He slit the envelope, skimmed the finely written script.

"—cannot understand why you left me and went East, Kenneth," she said in part. "And Chenango! Is that really a name of a college? If you must return to college—and your father provided handsomely for both of us in his estate—return to San Francisco and enter the local university. You could room at home, Kenneth."

"I do hope that the war has taught you not to play such silly games as football. It is not good for you, Kenneth! I worry so much about your face and miss you so—"

He laid the letter on the desk. The war had taught him many things, but not to quit football. He had learned hardness, the necessity for a man to stand on his own feet, often alone as he had done in a plane. Maybe his mother had pampered him too much. He remembered the swank, exclusive prep school he had attended. That at seventeen, he had owned his own roadster and had more pocket money than was good for him. But he had managed to enter Gonzago and play football despite his mother's protestations. It had been good for him, jarring him out of conceit and a soft life.

So he had come East to stand on his own feet. The return to football had been coincidental with his hookup with Riker Best. Strolling to the casement window, he stared moodily across the dark campus. Somewhere below someone strummed on a mandolin. "Heartache," an old tune. What difference did it make? Heartache or headache.

Pictures kaleidoscoped through his mind. The Phillipines. The war over,

but planes still in the air. His last flight, a solo dash to Manila and back. Late in the afternoon, he had wasted precious time avoiding a thunderstorm. As he neared the home field, flew in low for a landing, the tropic night dropped like a curtain. Suddenly pitch black, no landing lights, and danger.

He had tried to lift the plane while a hundred feet off the ground. Something had gone wrong. The plane struck the ground, bounced, and roared on. Then—crash. His face slammed into the instrument panel with terrific force.

The crash-team told most of it to him afterward. He had overshot the field in the darkness, crashed in the nearby woods. They had managed to save him from fiery death, but the blow and the flames—now he remembered the dull pain despite the morphine in his system. And the diagnosis of the surgeon. "Don't worry son. I can build up the nose, tissue the scars and you won't recognize yourself."

The recovery and operation. The first sight of his face two weeks later. "Perfect," the surgeon had said admiringly. And the nose was far more perfect than any nose had a right to be and the face perfectly proportioned. It accounted for the derisive nickname that Bendine had attached to him in September.

Once in the darkness of his room, he had stumbled against an opened door. The old aches had returned for two days although he had not mentioned it to his mother. After that, he had been overly careful of any contact that would harm his rebuilt face and had avoided, as far as he could, savage body contacts that Dan Taylor urged on his men. It had cost him effort, the penalty of restraint, and loss of esteem.

It had taken courage to sidestep trouble with Bendine. He wondered how long he could continue to avoid trouble. Could a man go through life along the easy path? Of course, he could turn in his uniform. He shrugged off the thought. There was something thrilling, elative about the game that forced him to play it. Now

it appeared that he was destined to ride the bench.

A RAP on the door and Ken said: "Come in."

Kinnard strolled in, offered: "How're you fellow?" Mel Stein tailed along and wanted to know: "That dumb cluck Bogg sure set you up for me on that last block. You all right?"

"Nothing serious," Ken answered.

From the window seat, Kinnard drawled. "You like this game of football, fellow?"

"It's a game," Ken admitted, hiding his real feelings.

"We all flew planes in the war," Mel Stein said. "Sure, you know football, like to play it or you'd turn in the uniform. So something must be eating your mind. Want to spill it to friends?"

"You're thinking of the way I wouldn't mix with Bendine?"

"Just a pop-off guy," Kinnard drawled. "You don't have to open up and we didn't have to come up here, either."

"It might be a long story," Ken said cautiously.

"We got all night if that helps."

"I don't like this end-crashing game of Dan's."

"Understandable," Stein agreed. "You stalled our right hand attack while you were in there. Trouble with Dan he likes to see his players unhinge the opposition. Keeps him in a mental rut. I found out long ago there's more than one way to polish off a good job."

"Right," Kinnard added. "If Dan ever psycho-analyzed my mind, he'd faint! Crashed once in Devon, bad. Shook me up. Every time I got to throw a block or buck the line, so help me, I shudder! But Dan keeps yelling to hit harder, I keep shuddering, and sometimes I don't know how I hit guys. If I had guts, I'd quit the game."

"From the way I see you play," Ken said slowly, "No one would know you had a thing on your mind."

"It was this way," Kinnard explained. "An army psychiatrist or psychologist, I forget which it was,

told me to detour any fear. Suggested I think of eating cherries everytime I took a plane up," Kinnard wagged his head. "And it worked, fellow. It got me aloft in a plane and that's how I do the gridiron job. Next time you see me hit something just remember I'm an old cherry eater!"

"But if you had been injured badly in the crash," Ken said, thinking of his own troubles, "would the cherry-idea help?"

Stein leaned forward, his eyes keen and understanding. "Heard about a war casualty up at Dartmouth or maybe it was Harvard. The medics did a plastic job on his face, but the guy kept thinking of his face and flinching. Then he went smart. Decided to forget about his face and just played as hard as he could."

"What happened?" Ken asked too sharply.

"The face took the punishment, what there was," Stein leaned against the desk, crossed his arms. "We don't butt into your problems, fellow, but we don't cotton to all this talk about you that we hear. If we can help, say the word. If not—" Stein gestured casually.

Silence. The strumming mandolin somewhere below now mourned with "I'll Walk Alone." Good or bad? Ken wondered. To walk alone, eh? That took courage. So did Kinnard fighting down the temptation to duck every block and tackle. The war casualty forgetting his face and coming out on top. Conquering yourself? That was a job a man had to do alone.

"I'll snap out of it," Ken said.

Promptly they ambled to the door, said, "See you tomorrow," and the door closed like a reprimand.

See you tomorrow.

There would be the scornful glances, the biting words from Dan Taylor and Bogg, the sneer in Bendine's voice. Fight them alone and conquer. Something courageous in that, like gay banners waving inside the mind. Alone, to win. That was the way to play it.

THE NEXT afternoon, Ken approached Dan Taylor during

forward passing drill. "I'd like another try at left end," he said quietly.

"You flunked the lab test yesterday," Dan growled, and wheeling away, barked: "Hey, Voght! More snap covering a pass. Use a fake to get around a defender see? An end's got to get into the clear."

So Ken found himself shoved into the ruck with the third and fourth stringers. With men who had little chance to make the varsity; with the not-quite athletes, the hope-to-be men who lacked speed or coordination or the necessary weight. A clannish lot, the scrubs were critical of the men ahead of them. They regarded Ken Whiting scornfully. Hadn't he toppled from the top? The guy had everything, everything but what counted most to a scrub—a fighting heart.

On Thursday night, Ken phoned the sorority house where Dot McIlroy roomed. A strange voice said over the phone: "She's out. Who shall I say called?"

"Ken Whiting."

"Oh. Well, she went to the movies with an old flame, Mr. Whiting," and the receiver clicked.

That would be with Bendine, of course. Had the big mouth been blabbing to Dot? Had she heard rumors eddying back from locker room and gridiron? Another name crossed off the slate! Alone, now. All alone.

A line from Shakespeare ran heavily through Ken's mind. "*Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, creeps in this petty pace from day to day.*" But he wouldn't give in to them, not when it required more courage to play it alone.

So the gossiping voices were at work. "Whiting can't take it," someone had whispered. Or: "Sure, a handsome guy, but that's his trouble. Protecting his face." And another, perhaps: "Ever watch him back up? Chenango's backward end!" Let the voices loose their poison!

Friday on the gridiron and a fast, light practice. Sprints, punting, passing, but no contact work. Duck soup for Ken and his speed. When the varsity began signal drill a manager

came over to Ken and said brusquely: "Report to the pits, Whiting."

At the pits, Ken met a short, stocky man dressed in a twenty-dollar hat, a hundred dollar topcoat over his paunch a painted tie, and shined shoes. A man with gimlet eyes, Riker Best, Chenango '23. No greetings or welcome or handshake. Just: "You're not doing well, Whiting."

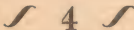
"Doc Barkingham," Ken answered, "says I'm receiving A's in his courses. Wasn't he the prof you recommended, Mr. Best?"

"Football, Whiting!" Lines tightened around Best's mouth. Anger flared in his eyes. "A man who evades a hard knock, is no good in business, Whiting. I had hopes for you." A negligent wave of a pudgy hand. "Talked to Dan and persuaded him to give you another chance in the game tomorrow. If you fail me then, don't report back to New York in February, understand?"

Riker Best—hard designing, calculating to acquire the things that pleased him. Operating men like they were on strings. A pressure man, Ken thought, seeing him in his true light, dangling a prize before my eyes.

"Once," Ken said quietly, "I was willing to give you my best, but you didn't want it that way, Mr. Best. On your way back to the hotel, stuff that job down the drain pipe." He wheeled away, chin up, a lift in his stride.

They couldn't pressure him. Best couldn't, and neither could Dan Taylor or Bogg or Bendine. In a sense, Dot McIlroy and Mel Stein and drawling Kinnard had all sought to put pressure on him. There wasn't any need for that. He would walk alone, do things his own way.



THE BIG Syracuse team hadn't come down to Chenango College for the Fall Prom. A willing, alert, hard-hitting, football-wise crew. They took the Raider's opening kickoff and belted at the line from single-wing thrown mostly to the right. Voght, the rookie at left

end, followed Dan's instructions and crashed. Twice he spilled Meeker, the tailback, on inside slants and forced a punt.

Century Wayne returned to midfield. From the T, Buzz Waring sent Stein on a crossbuck. Syracuse tunneled, slowed the key blocker, and hog-tied Stein for no gain. Kinnard lost a yard at center. A pass to Buck Pallison and the crowd groaned when it slipped through his hands. Punt.

Back came Syracuse and Ken knew it was going to be tough. He sat on the bench, grounded for the day, probably. He studied the Syracuse attack, noted the giveaways, the weaknesses of personnel, their strengths.

Again Voght crashed, slowed up the power, and forced a towering punt that Wayne had no chance to return. The Raiders ground out a first down on three quick openers, then punted.

It happened, just as Ken knew it would happen, against a slick-operation. Voght, conditioned to expect the slant, crashed headlong into the lead blocker. They went down together, but the two following blockers curved around the pile and there came Meeker, working an in-and-out end run that had been set up to foil Voght's crashing play.

Kinnard cut over, but a blocker picked him off. The second blocker pivot-blocked Mel Stein. Meeker swarmed into the clear with Century Wayne sliding over to force him out of bounds. It was a pretty play to watch. Meeker slowing, Wayne closing in, then the streaking Syracuse left end crossing over fast to clip Wayne from the side. Meeker cut loose behind the block. Exultant Syracuse cheers carried him on the long run to the Raiders goal line. A sure placement kick, a seven-point lead.

The Raiders rallied after the kick-off. Syracuse uncorked a flexible, shifting defense that halted several drives. With the running game throttled, Buzz Waring shifted to passes, but the defenders covered man-for-man and thwarted the attempts to score. At halftime, seven points still separated the teams and Dan Taylor swore like a crazed man.

"Unhinge 'em!" he roared at the disgruntled players lounging in the locker rooms. "Knock 'em clear up into the stands, Payson!....Quigg, slam those drifting ends down Hell, they play like this Whiting guy!.... Kinnard, get more steam in your bucks. You wanna sit this out in the sun with a coed?...Stein, get the lead out of your tail. You ain't flying no P-47 out there!...Look, Adelson, you're a hell of a captain. I got a daughter home could play better'n you and—"

A lot of words, Ken thought, sitting on the fringe of the squad. Steam, but no points scored. Why not beat Syracuse at its own game? Tunnel the line, drift with the ends on the sweeps. On offense, take advantage of the man-for-man coverage of Syracuse on passes. Crossover to free the receivers. Open the Syracuse defense with passes, free the running attack for Wayne and Kinnard and Stein to run.

With Dan's fiery words ringing in their ears, the squad sprinted out. Twice they drove deep into Syracuse territory. Once Voght failed to clear a defender on a pass play. Syracuse intercepted and Ken dug his cleats deep into bench turf, knotted his hands and groaned. Then, at the start of the third quarter, Syracuse began to roll.

POWER PLAYS, mixed with spinners and reverses, set the defenders up for efficient blocks and Syracuse crossed midfield. With Voght still crashing, the visitors uncloaked the in-and-out run. Buzz Waring drifted over from right half and made the save behind Mel Stein. The Raiders rallied, took over on the twenty-yard line when a Syracuse field goal failed.

Time-out on the field and the call ran along the Chenango bench: "Whiting, Whiting."

Ken reported. "Get in there and win the game!" Dan roared. Ken turned to the pile of headgears, selected a helmet with rubber-covered wire that would protect his face. Dan stripped it from his hands. "Forget your mug,

pretty boy!" he raged, and Ken picked up his own helmet.

"Well?" Buzz Waring asked in the middle of the huddle.

"Dan sent me in to win the game," Ken said honestly.

Bendine sneered: "He scraped the bottom of the barrel to do it!"

"Crossover pass," Waring ordered, but Captain Adelson snapped: "No. Wait till we get out of here!"

"48, cross buck," Waring said, changing the play.

Ken lined up alongside of Bendine. The snap. The hefty Syracuse tackle butted forward. Ken worked his feet, lunged in close, tried to heave the tackle aside. Stein hit hard behind a blocker. A pileup with Ken near the bottom. It happened while he lay sideways. A fist slammed against his nose. Ken's eyes watered, fear ran along his spine. Oh, my God, the nose!

He stumbled up, conscious of the blood streaming from the injured nose, and Bendine jeered: "Like that sock?" It had been Bendine's work, Ken knew, but there was no time to lose. He grabbed his nose with one hand. Then to the consternation of the fans, he ran straight up the middle of the field toward the nearby locker rooms. Fear gave wings to his feet. He didn't hear the boo's rolling down from the Chenango fans. The nose, the nose! Was it still there, still in good shape?

Into the silent, echoing locker room. Cold water from the tap to stanch the flow of blood, to ease the dull ache. Fearfully he approached the wall mirror, stared at his face. The nose still in place. The flesh puffed, bloody but in place. Like the release of impounded water through flood gates, fear rushed out of his body. And there was a job to do out there, he remembered. A couple of jobs to do.

As he ran down the sideline Syracuse punted out-of-bounds deep in Raider territory. "On my own," Ken thought, and without reporting to Dan Taylor he raced in and replaced Voght.

He faced Bendine in the huddle. "Say something," Ken said.

Bendine growled: "You still got your nose on, pret—"

Ken moved. A left hand uppercut to Bendine's chin then the sure, hard, long-delayed right cross to Bendine's middle. Mouth open in amazement Bendine sat down hard. The referee pushed inside the huddle, demanded: "What's the trouble?"

"Only a family quarrel," Ken assured him. He shook one fist in Bendine's face. "We're even. If you get in my way again—" They were staring at him, surprised, confounded by the change. "Crossover pass," Ken snapped at Waring. "Make it good or I'll be back to belt you next!"

"Cripes, it's awake," Buzz said admiringly. "Use your wings."

Wings on Ken's feet. Oh, he had been awake and watchful from his bench-seat. Fake the wingback, cross into the bucket. Avoid Buck Pallison crossing over to drag Meeker, the safety, off the trail. Suicide to sling a pass from the twenty-yard line? A surprise move.

There came the ball, long and high. Ken notched up the speed, jumped. He made a one-hand catch, hit the ground, and almost careened across the sideline. Then he lit out, the roar of the Chenango stands sweet music in his ears.

Meeker angled over. Ken figured rapidly, knew they would meet near the Syracuse thirty-yard line. Two ways to play it. Fake and duck around. Smash through. He bulleted forward as Meeker closed in. Gathering himself for the all-out try as Meeker slowed, Ken suddenly slid to a stop.

BUT OF nowhere roared Buck Pallison. He clamped a block on the surprised Meeker and Ken stormed into the flat, raced to the end zone. Teammates raced up, thumped his back. Buck Pallison, grin a mile wide, shouted: "Knew you could use some help! So I cut over!"

Frinkle came in on the hop, booted the extra point that knotted the score at seven-seven. The stadium was in an uproar. Hoarse cheers rolled down from the tiered seats,

overwhelmed the men.

On the kickoff, Syracuse roared back to the forty-yard line. The quarterback eyed Ken in the flat, stooped and gave the orders. The slant, of course. Ken slammed across the line, faked once to the outside, then swerved in close. He belted Meeker for a loss. Long, prolonged cheering.

The next play started like a slant. Ken crashed in. Then, deft as a dancer, he sidestepped the first blocker, slid wider and deeper. Sure, the in-and-out run again because he had lulled the Syracuse quarterback into thinking he was a crasher like Voght.

The next blocker pounded up. Ken stretched out his hands, grabbed the blocker's shoulders and rode with the block. Meeker still ran to the outside. Near the sideline, Ken slid to a stop, danced, then cut around the final blocker. Meeker had delayed his cut too long. Ken lowered his shoulders and tackled hard. Roaring cheers and teammates pounding his back and screaming encouragement.

Third down and nineteen yards to gain at midfield. Pass, and you could feel the tension running through the crowd. Ken crept in closer, warned Bendine: "You better move in fast or else!"

The snap. Ken left his place like a sprinter. Blockers eased back to protect Meeker on the pass. Ken slammed through. A blocker leaned in and Ken drove over the top, came down on Meeker. His hands slapped the ball. He tumbled to the ground, rolled over, and sat up.

Out ahead of Ken and behind the fallen Meeker, lumbered the towering Bendine. Screening him from blockers, ran Buck Pallison and Colgrave. They fended off two desperate Syracuse tacklers, convoyed Bendine safely into the end zone.

Pandemonium among the Chenango stands. The long, roaring, rolling cheers cascading down across the gridiron. The lowering sun and the long shadows crawling across the field. Exultant, victory-mad Raiders storming at the grim Syracuse offense and then—the gun banged. Victory,

Chenango 14, Syracuse 7.

A MADHOUSE inside the locker room. Noise and back slapping and excited chatter. Dan Taylor strode over to Ken, grasped his hand, and growled hoarsely: "You found it when we needed it, fellow."

Ken said: "I always had it."

"Why'd you run to the dressing rooms when you got hit in the nose?" Dan asked curiously.

"Stage fright," Ken said. "There I was out there in front of that crowd, eating cherries and—"

"Eating cherries!"

"Sure, gulping whole handfuls down. Then they must have seen me and I had to get out of there."

"Just a second-hand cherry eater," Kinnard drawled, and winked.

A short, stubby man pushed through the mob. Riker Best, Chenango '23, red-faced, wild-eyed. He wrung Ken's hand chortled: "You saved the day, Kenny boy! What a man! Didn't I tell Dan he should ought to give you another try?" Best glanced around for approving nods, turned to Ken again. "Have dinner with me at the Inn tonight, Kenny old boy! Wait'll I tell the gang how I sent you here! Wow!"

When Riker Best shoved off, Kinnard asked curiously: "Who's the old duck that won the game for us, pal?"

"My ex-boss," Ken said. That's all there was to it. No sinecure for him in February. You could go it alone and—then he stopped. Go *what* alone? Hadn't Buck Pallison, playing way over his head, come up from the ruck and bopped off Meeker so Ken could score? Hadn't Bendine been there to grab the batted pass and hadn't Colgrave and Buck escorted him over the goal line for the win? And Frinkle coming in to boot home the badly needed extra points. But that was enough. Some things you might play alone, but it took team spirit and cooperation to win on the gridiron.

Mel Stein and Kinnard and Ken strolled out into the crisp dusk. In the West, the sun sank behind the rimmed hills. Blood red, the color of guts and the Raiders.

Stein asked: "Whatever happened

to that blonde you were squiring Ken?"

Ken grinned. What did a blonde matter? "Left me in the lurch when I went sour," he explained.

Kinnard drawled: "Mel, you think we ought to wise him up?"

"Sure," Stein agreed.

"It was this way," Kinnard explained as they entered Willow Walk along the campus lake. "We figured you were protecting some kind of an injury. So we came up to lend you a hand. First off, we couldn't figure what it was so I led off with that frame-up story about me cracking up in a plane and taking my mind off the crash by eating cherries, see?"

"It helped some," Ken agreed, and asked Stein: "That fairy tale you told about the player at Dartmouth or Harvard. That kosher?"

"Yes," Stein said, and grinned.

"Guess I better tell you the rest of it. You see, we figured you must have had some kind of a face injury in the Pacific. You were interested in my story, not Kin's. Then your face tipped us off. Hell, we saw a lot of facial plastic jobs in our sector and figured that perfect nose of yours and the way you kept fingering your nose was the tipoff. What you didn't remember, Ken, was that those facial jobs are tough. So—I smacked you in the nose that time on the cross-buck."

"Not Bendine," Ken said, turning the facts around in his mind.

"No, he just happened to be on hand and crack wise."

So it had come out all right, Ken thought. Actually, he hadn't been on his own in this. Not with Kinnard and Mel Stein around. But there was one more thing he had to do.

He stepped close to Stein, jabbed. "Hey!" Stein ejaculated, and stumbled backward. But Ken had jabbed quick and hard. His fist slammed against Stein's nose. Blood ran out and Stein went down to the lake to rinse off the blood.

"That," Kinnard said when Stein returned, "is what I call poetic justice. A blow-for-blow. Let's go eat."

Arm in arm, they sauntered off under the shedding trees.

CAMPUS *Payoff*

A Complete Novelet



By C. PAUL JACKSON



It was a long-shot chance that sports-writer Grant took, when he tried to operate on the Kalbion varsity — and it could just as easily wreck them beyond hope as straighten them out!

1

I STOOD there in the office of Dean Ray Pollett, looking out the window with him. The Dean's office is in the fieldhouse and overlooks the football practice field. Maybe you think that's an extraordinary location for the office of a college dean. Well, Ray Pollett is an extraordinary dean.

He'd been varsity coach at Kalbion up until six years ago when doctors advised him that football coaching was not compatible with the tricky heart he owned. The college had made him Dean but Ray Pollett's love for football and genuine interest in all Kalbion men had never lessened. I began to absorb that fact the day I braced him about rumors of dissension on the football squad and he phoned me to come over and see him.

"They look like a lot of grief for other conference teams, all right," I said. I nodded toward the thirty-odd huskies throwing and kicking footballs and running all over the practice field. "But the best material in the world won't make a ballclub if there's pulling and hauling between the coach and the squad. What gives out here, Dean?"

Pollett was gray-haired and he'd put on a little thickness through the waist, but his heavy-browed dark eyes were as keen as ever and he still owned the incisiveness at going straight to the core of a thing that I remembered from days when I pestered him for stuff to write up for the *Kalbion Weekly Argus*.

"A thing like this might not do Kalbion any good, Grant," he said. "You wouldn't want to cause your old school embarrassment over an ugly bit of publicity, Grant?"

I was a hard boiled sports writer. There was no mushy sentiment in me. I kind of pitied the Dean for throwing out a line like that.

"I'm a newspaperman," I shrugged. "I'll print the facts."

"And let the pieces from the explosion fall where they may," Pollett murmured. "Your cynical air

doesn't portray the real Grant Wheat, though." The Dean was silent a space of seconds, then nodded toward a lean, clean-cut guy down on the sideline of the practice field. "We do have a little problem," Pollett admitted. "Maybe we need your help in solving it."

"What's the problem?" I asked in a nasty tone. "And how do you figure a cynical sports writer can help?"

He'd gotten under my skin. The Dean had that knack of getting under a fellow's skin. He didn't appear to be aware of the nastiness.

"Terry Moore," Pollett said. "And Mort Shields and Jake Holk. They're the problem. The answer to your second question is that I don't know how, but I respect fully the power of the press."

I GAVE him a quick look. I could not tell whether he was ragging me or not. Before I could say anything the Dean went on.

"Things that you've heard aren't made up of whole cloth, Grant. Things aren't good on our squad. Maybe that's why Terry Moore is standing there on the sidelines now, trying to figure out what's sour, instead of being at the varsity quarterback spot where he belongs. A fluttery undercurrent of tension has been present since the day equipment was issued. I sort of maneuvered Mort Shields into leaving Terry in charge of the squad while Mort attended the conference schedule meet, but it looks now as though I pulled a boner."

"Everything is as clear as pea soup," I said. "Problem: Shields, Moore and Holk. Solution: you pulled a blooper in getting Shields to leave his pal in charge of practice. Nuts, Dean! According to your own words, that gang down there is such a powerhouse that nothing in the conference can stop them, so why worry? Of course you may be a bit prejudiced. But it all doesn't add up to this business that's being freely bruited about by the boys who usually know."

Pollett said, "Suppose we go down and talk with Terry. You're a trained reporter. Maybe you can see things that I don't."

Terry Moore wore a frown that accentuated the bony angles of his face. He seemed lost in thought and didn't hear the Dean and me until Pollett clapped him on the shoulder.

"Do they look as good to you as they do to me, Terry, or does Grant here have the straight dope in writing off my opinion as prejudiced?"

The frown smoothed from Moore's face as he turned, but there remained a kind of worried puzzlement in his gray eyes.

"You remember Grant Wheat, Terry?" Pollett said. "Used to run the *Argus*. Now he's sports editor on the biggest newspaper in Central City."

Terry shoved out his hand and I gripped it, grinning. "Same skinny nuisance that used to pester you guys for stuff to fill the *Argus*." I said "What gives for my sheet? The Dean is playing some kind of game that I don't get, but I'll settle for enough stuff for my column."

It was a screwy thing to say and I don't know why I said it. Just making conversation, I guess. Pollett flicked a glance at me then said blandly, "I phoned Grant to come out and see for himself that we're going to be tough. With you running a T game, I'll even predict that we'll give mighty Central Tech all they can handle."

Terry Moore's clear gray eyes stabbed at the Dean and then at me. He fingered the whistle that hung from a thong around his neck and scuffed a cleated shoe in the turf. "It's a beautiful dream," he said.

"Well, you've got one of your cagy big time rivals biting his nails, anyway," I said. "I watched Central Tech's workout yesterday. What will they do with Moore and all that gang he brought back with him? I see young Helk once in a while and he's pretty confident that he'll captain the first Kalbion team to beat us since before the War. Have they really got so much? Will they play the same old power games? That's the sort of pumping Tech's head man tried on me. He's only been there a couple of years and doesn't know I wouldn't give him any tips that would go against us. Which reminds me, I

don't know the answers. Are we going to shift to the T game? Mort Shields has stuck to the double wing game that the Dean coached."

TERRY RAN a hand through his soot-black hair and the frown on his bony face deepened.

"Look," he said. "Shields is the coach. I'm just a guy dumb enough to get talked into a spot that he wants no part of. I'm nominally in charge while Shields is gone, but Shields is coach. I'm not making any statements on what we're going to do, or have, or anything. Get your dope from Shields."

I didn't miss the formality of the 'Shields' instead of the more familiar 'Mort'. I began to be interested. Ray Pollett hadn't just been clicking his molars when he said that this situation needed help.

"I'd figured on giving tomorrow's column with an early plug for you as All Conference quarterback again? Supported by the juggernaut the Dean forecasts, you can't miss."

Terry grunted, eyed Pollett. You could almost see his mind working. He thought he'd spotted the 'game' Pollett was playing.

"You'd stick your neck out on something a country mile from probability," Terry said. "Then to Pollett more than to me, 'Doggone it, I've already told you how I feel. I'm twenty-six years old. I put in an extra eighteen months after the Nips quit because I happened to be in a spot where the Occupation Forces needed my services. It was a responsible job. I'm not bragging, I'm just telling you so you'll know that I didn't come back to college just to revel in kid stuff. Fact is, football doesn't have any great appeal for me anymore."

Terry Moore turned abruptly and walked toward the players out on the field. Pollett stared after him.

"What goes on around here, anyway?" I said. "Terry Moore didn't used to be afflicted with big-shotitis."

"He isn't now." Pollett sighed gloomily. "You miss the point of things, Grant, and that crack about me playing a game didn't help, either.

You've got to help. Things are liable to explode any day and it won't be only a good football squad that gets ruined."

"I'll buy," I said. "I'm ready to do anything I can. Give out. I smell a story."

"There's a story, all right," Pollett admitted. "I trust you as a Kalbion man not to break it until it's worked out for the good of the men concerned—and for Kalbion."

I nodded. Pollett looked out toward the men on the field.

"Terry Moore and Mort Shields were roommates and friends back in 1941," he said. "They were both Seniors, only Mort was headed for medical school and an M. D. That's what he should have done, he's the type to make a good doctor and it's been his ambition all along. I've sat in their rooms and talked with them about my retiring from coaching and Terry taking over when he graduated. But Terry was in R.O.T.C. and he enlisted in the Marines a day or two after Pearl Harbor. Mort Shields tried to follow him but a football knee kept Mort from getting into any of the services."

POLLETT STOPPED again and his gaze went out toward Terry Moore and he heaved a sigh.

"Mort and Terry kidded how after Mort got his M.D., Terry would give him a job as team physician so he wouldn't starve. But it didn't work out that way. Mort gave up his medical studies and took over the coaching job when I retired. Mort did a job in keeping football alive when we had scarcely enough men to field a team, and he turned out a better-than-fair squad last year when material came back, but—well, Mort just isn't cut out for coaching. His heart isn't in it, really.

"He stubbornly refuses to change the type of offense he learned under me. Not that I hold any particular brief for the T over a double wing system, but it's further evidence that Mort is allowing himself to be governed by a resentful jealousy that I doubt he knows holds him. Terry and the boys that followed him to Kalbion from the Marines played the

T game, you see. Terry Moore isn't consciously aware of the restless irritation he owns, either. Also, Captain Jake Holk comes into the picture."

I said, "Where?"

"It's all in the same pattern, Grant. Holk was the quarterback last year. Terry may honestly believe that football has lost its appeal for him, but it hasn't. Why is he back here? But with the sourness that's eating him: the natural rivalry, and maybe apprehension that Holk feels—well, there's the crux of the rumors you've heard."

Pollett sighed again.

"I'm responsible for the suggestion to Mort that he leave Terry in charge. I thought it might be an opening wedge toward smoothing out things. But Holk has taken it wrong. The whole situation is like a keg of dynamite."

I looked out toward Terry Moore. He kicked at the turf like a guy who is sore at the world would. He blew a blast on his whistle.

"All right," he said. "Blue team take the ball on the forty. Use the same stuff we tried yesterday."

/ 2 /

THE BLUE team ran a play that was intended to be a forward stemming from a fake off-tackle slant. It was smeared for a loss.

"You started fading too soon," Terry said to a swarthy, thick-shouldered lad in the Blue backfield. "Try it again and take it cool. There's nothing magic about the T game. Ball handling and catching the other guys before they're set, that's all there is to it."

I could see the grim scowl on the face of Captain Jake Holk. The very set of his shoulders was rebellious as he squatted behind the center. He barked, "Heh!" and the snapback spat into his hands.

The guards and center blocked stationary. Holk pivoted, faked a hand-off to a halfback and swung in behind the other as the decoy swerved at the line and drove for the flank. Holk

clumsily began drifting backward before he'd taken three steps. A big tackle in a dirty white jersey reared up in the second team line and belted, "Pass!" and charged after Holk.

The White secondary tacked onto eligible Blue men as they sifted through. Every receiver was covered as Holk drew back his arm, sought a target. The big tackle swarmed all over Holk. He buried the varsity captain eight yards behind the line of scrimmage.

"You faded too soon again," Terry said. "You tipped the defense what was coming."

"Nobody can cover a screwy thing like that," Holk growled. "The defense is bound to know it's a phoney."

"Not if the fake is carried out properly."

Holk glared, said defiantly, "Suppose you show us how it's done—on the White team!"

Nobody missed the challenge in Holk's tone. Men in white jerseys eyed Terry expectantly. You could feel the tension. Tamlin, Jarvor, Orr, Mazurka, the big tackle—men that had gone through things with Terry. The big black-haired guy was no more than human. He accepted Holk's challenge.

I saw him look over the White team and it suddenly struck me that every member of the scrubs but one was a man who had followed Terry Moore to Kalbion. Shields hadn't utilized a one of them on his varsity.

"Right," Terry said. "Pete, how about the guard job that Rollins has and giving me a spot in your backfield?"

"Check." Pete Orr grinned as Terry slipped on a white jersey. "I like it better up there where things happen, anyway."

THE WHITES huddled and there was an abrupt surge of something in the chatter of Terry's mates as they snapped into formation.

"Here's where we dish it out—these monkees have shoved us around too much—you call 'em, Terry, we'll knock 'em for a loop . . ."

Terry took the center's snap and

faked expertly to Tamlin, cutting in fast from the right. The feigned handoff was good enough that a Blue lineman lunged at Tamlin as the White back bent low and drove for the hole. Mazurka had made off-tackle. Terry was right at Tamlin's hip. The Blue secondary converged toward the threatened spot.

At the last second's fraction before he followed Tamlin into the hole, Terry socked his cleats into the turf, shifted his weight and back-pedaled five steps while his gaze swept the field.

Jarvor had sneaked around the opposite flank and circled unseen in behind the defensive back who now charged frantically to cover. Mazurka had knifed through and was barreling across into the same area. Terry cocked his arm and wafted a soft spiral across the field.

The ball settled into the basket that Jarvor made of his hands. Mazurka's block removed the threat of the defensive Blue back as Jarvor streaked downfield, but Holk angled across from safety and had Jarvor pinned to the sideline. Then a shout cut through the air.

"Flip me that thing, Jarv!"

Pete Orr had blocked long enough to give his backs the needed time and then highballed downfield. He was about three yards behind Jarvor and ten yards toward the center of the field. Without a second's hesitation, as though the play had been planned that way, Jarvor shovelled an underhand pass across to Orr. The next instant Jarvor slammed a full body block into Holk that knocked the captain cleanly out of the play.

Pete Orr galloped twenty-eight yards and put the oval down behind the goal line and sat on it.

"That's how it's done, Holk!" Orr chortled raucously.

Terry Moor picked up the football and tossed it to Holk. "You try it again this time," Terry said.

That was when I became aware that a tense figure stood beside me there on the sideline. I looked around into the scowling face of Mort Shields. The blue eyes of Kalbion's coach were as cold and gray as old

pewter. I started to say something to Shields but just then Holk slapped the football to the ground and glared angrily at Terry.

"I've had enough," Holk spat. "There's going to be a showdown right now!"

Players looked at each other, looked at the captain and then at Terry. The squad gathered around the pair. Pollett laid a hand on Mort Shields' arm, said, "Easy does it, Mort. Maybe—"

"Quiet!" Shields silenced the Dean.

Out on the field Terry said, "I don't follow you, Holk. What's your beef?"

"Oh, I've got no beef!" Sarcasm dropped from Holk's words. "I'm only the captain of the team, why should I beef! Don't think that us ordinary guys aren't properly impressed by having the boon of the great Terry Moore's presence!" Holk glared around the white-jerseyed team and added, "And his stooges! Oh, my, yes!"

TERRY LOOKED down sharply at the stocky captain. "You're about as far off the ball as you could get," Terry said. "Schoolkid jealousy won't get anybody anything. We're all supposed to be out here for one thing—to give Kalbion the best ball-club we can."

"Is that sticky, coming from you!" Holk sneered. "If everything is sweetness and light and all for dear old Kalbion, where do you get off inaugurating an offense that's exactly opposite from the stuff Coach taught last year? Kalbion always has played a double wing."

"Things change. We've got the material for the T game and—"

"—The great Terry Moore would be in the key spot," Holk cut in. "We've got the same power that we had last year. Coach hasn't said anything to me about a shift in system. We beat teams that played the T. I don't believe he intends to change."

"Every team that uses the T doesn't automatically win all their games," Terry said. "I'm only claiming that our material is better suited to the T game."

"That lucky touchdown doesn't prove a thing," Holk said tightly. "Over a stretch of a game, we'd wear your fancy stuff to a frazzle. You'd be a setup without a steady ground game."

"Well for Pete's sake, who said you didn't need a running game!" Terry snorted impatiently. "And you need power to force the defense to play tight before you can use open stuff. That's part of the T game. You're acting like a surly kid, Holk. I tell you that Shields will—"

"Shields will go along with the game he's always played and taught!"

Everybody jerked around at the interruption. Mort Shields strode angrily toward the knot of players. I followed eagerly. Dean Pollett hesitated, then came slowly after us.

"I've been watching this whole performance," Shields said. "I can't say that it has contributed anything to our progress. I advise you all to forget that it took place."

Again Pollett laid a hand on the Coach's arm, said, "Terry was only carrying out what he thought you wanted."

Shields shook off the Dean's hand, gave him a cold glare.

"Maybe you figured this would happen when you suggested that I leave him in charge," Shields said. "You've stuck your bill into my business too much, Pollett. If you're in with Moore in this rotten thing, I'm glad to be forewarned!"

That knocked the props from under the Dean. He stared at Shields with pained hurt in his eyes, gulped and looked helplessly at me.

"Do something, Grant," he said in an undertone. "Anything to break down this thing."

I guess all newspapermen own an overdeveloped sense of drama. This was drama. And besides, right at the moment I could think of nothing to do.

"Are you off your nut!" Terry eyed Shields. "The Dean isn't in on anything. There isn't anything to be in on. I don't get this at all."

"And I don't get your wasting time trying to teach my team something that we won't use!"

"But—but we've discussed changing to a T! You agreed that the T game has advantages over the double wing. You—"

"I gave you credit for realizing that a coach chooses the type of game his team plays," Shields cut in. "I don't propose to sacrifice the hours we spent last year during spring practice in perfecting our timing. We are not making any change in our offensive pattern!"

Shields stood there a second's space staring defiantly at Terry Moore. Then the coach waved a hand toward the fieldhouse.

"Everyone in," he said. "Practice is over."

IT'S KIND of funny what a college campus does to a fellow. I'd been out of college since '40 and I'd done my hitch in the Navy and there had never been any urge on my part to go back to the old campus after I was discharged. In fact, aside from the final conference game that I covered at Kalbion Field last November, this was the first time I'd been back since graduation. But now while I walked slowly over campus walks, a hard-to-define something seemed to creep into my blood.

I suppose it was long dormant habit that made me stroll toward Administration Hall. It was the oldest, the first campus building. For years it hadn't housed a classroom but it was a busy place all the same. Extra curricular activities were mostly given homes in Ad. Hall. The *Kalbion Argus* was there. I was thinking of other days when I'd hurried along these same walks, getting to the old building to pound out stuff for the *Argus*.

Then I was thinking of the old steel wagon tire that someone had hung in the areaway back in horse-and-buggy days. They had wanted something to make noise with after the team won a game. Nobody knew how long the wagon tire had hung there, but everyone tried to get to the tire to bang it after we won a game, and let the world know that Kalbion reigned supreme.

Sometimes the steel circle was banged for other reasons, too. Like

when the Frosh wanted to signal defiance to the Sophs before the Class Games. The wagon tire was one of those things that grow into tradition on a college campus. But nobody ever banged it just for fun; there was always somebody who knew why it clanged.

It suddenly occurred to me that I'd never whanged the thing.

From thoughts like that it wasn't far to get back to Mort Shields and Terry Moore. I'd phoned my stuff in to the sports desk and my head was full of the vague outline of a plan to help Dean Pollett pull things into line. But before I gave the Dean the plan, I wanted to get Mort Shields' side of the business.

I'd called his rooming house and been informed that he wouldn't be in for half an hour. I was killing the time with this campus stroll. I passed the College Hospital and I thought of the day when an anxious group of students had huddled outside the entrance waiting to hear how bad Mort Shields was injured. I remembered that Terry Moore had been about nuts because the docs wouldn't let him in to see Shields. Then the great relief of all of us when a doctor finally came out and announced that Shields would be okay, that he had a badly twisted knee but that he'd regained consciousness and there was no skull fracture.

I remembered that Mort Shields had got knocked cold when he threw a block that took two tacklers out of the way and enabled Terry Moore to score the touchdown that had won a ballgame.

Sure a guy gets a perspective on things like that after he's been out of school and bumped around. I'd thought I was all over it. But I'll be darned if I didn't find myself thinking of the Shield-Moore-Holk thing in a kind of die-for-dear-old-Rutgers spirit. Like I said, it's kind of funny what a college campus does to you.

I had just about time to make Shields' room now. I tried to rid my mind of any prejudice and approach this interview objectively. I was a reporter, wasn't I?

MORT SHIELDS let me down with a great big wallop.

"I don't have any statement of any kind to make," he said when I explained that I wanted both sides. "You were out there and you saw what happened. Moore is out to gain his own ends and the hell with anyone that stands in his road. Maybe you can get a yarn from Moore."

"Now, wait a minute," I said. "You talk like you figure everyone is after your scalp. After all, I'm a Kalbion man and—"

"Hah! The Old Alma Mater approach, is it? That stuff went out with noseguards!"

I didn't feel in the least bit sheepish. I only felt kind of sorry for Shields. I said, "I'm going to stick with this brawl until I learn the score, Shields. If you don't want to play ball, nice, I'll dig it out anyway."

"Okay. So what am I supposed to do, play chimes?"

I eyed Kalbion's coach a space. I'd graduated when he was a Junior and I'd never been exactly a pal of his. But this didn't seem like the Shields I remembered as an undergraduate.

"You know the old wagon tire behind Ad Hall?" I asked.

He looked at me as though he thought I was nuts. "What's that got to do with anything you've said?"

"Listen a few minutes after I leave, Shields. I'm declaring myself in on this clambake."

I left his place and walked over to the ancient building. I took the ten pound sledge that was chained to the stanchion that supported the wagon tire. I banged the steel circle a resounding belt and a clang rolled across the campus and I somehow felt better. I went to Dean Pollett's diggings and I didn't tell him that I'd been to see Shields. I didn't explain about banging the tire, either.

But I did outline the little plan that had been forming in my nut. The Dean thought it all over a minute or two then sighed.

"I'll back you, Grant," he said. "It looks as though desperate measures are in order."

I WOULDN'T have missed Kalbion practice the next day for anything. But I watched at first from the window in Pellett's office. Rusty, the cocky, tough-eyed staff camera man I'd sent, was out on the field before Shields showed up. Following the directions I'd given, Rusty sought out Terry Moore. Rusty told me afterward what took place before I got there.

"I'm from the *Times*," Rusty said. "The boss sent me out to get some action shots for a spread he's giving you guys Sunday."

"Glad to oblige," Terry said. "But you've got the wrong man. You want to see Shields."

"You're Terry Moore, ain't you?"

"That's right."

"Then you're the guy I want. You and the lads that were on the White team in yesterday's workout."

Terry Moore had given Rusty a penetrating look, asked, "What goes?"

"I only use the flash bulbs," Rusty said. "The boss told me to get shots of you and Tamlin and Jarvor and Orr and Mazurka and—well, the gang that wore white in the scrimmage yesterday."

Terry eyed Rusty a long moment then shrugged. "You ought to know what you want," Terry said. "But Shields is coach. You'll have to get his okay."

Rusty was busy catching Terry passing and Pete Orr stretching for passes and Mazurka charging with fierce expression and Tamlin and the other lads when I saw Mort Shields emerge from the fieldhouse. I beat it down fast. I got on the field in time to hear Shields demand of Rusty what was going on.

"Greetings, Coach," I said. "Did you hear the wagon tire clang last night?"

He scowled. "What's the meaning of this," he demanded.

"Is that a nice tone to use to a man who is going to give your squad a spread of publicity? Rusty is following my request that he get pics for a feature on Kalbion football."

Mort Shields gave me a hard look.

"You're getting a peculiar repre-

sentation of Kalbion football," he said. "These men are not first stringers.

"Could be that's what the feature will point out," I said. "Tamlin was All State in high school before he enlisted and he saw a lot of play last year on a good Marine team: Jarvor had two years experience in the Southern Conference before he went into service: Mazurka was darn near a unanimous selection as an All choice when he played on a Big Ten Navy trainee team in '44; Pete Orr has been recognized by experts as a potential star on any team. Not to say anything about Terry Moore. Yet these men are second stringers on your ballclub. Looks as though there is a story here, Coach."

SHIELDS JERKED a glare toward Terry Moore then swivelled his gaze to me. "This whole thing smells," Shields said. "If you dare print a real story, Wheat, I'll give you one!"

I shrugged. I'd poked around some among the typewriter brethern in the city that morning. I knew some things that Shields didn't know I knew.

"If you mean the malarkey you've hinted at about Moore being out to undermine you for your job," I said, "forget it. It you had brains enough to keep your ears apart you'd have traced that down to a gent on the Central Tech coaching staff. It's pure propaganda. They're trying to—"

"Get out!" Shields was tight-lipped. "And take this camera guy with you. I'm, running my ballclub and I won't have outsiders barging in with any crazy lies!"

"Do you care to be quoted on that, Shields?" I was getting sore. This guy was something. "It couldn't be that you're hiding things? Fans would be interested to know why such men as Moore, Tamlin, Orr, Mazurka and these other guys are on your second team."

Shields just glared. I admit that right then I felt a little uneasy. I'd been so sure that Shields would see the light without going all the way. He didn't say a darn thing.

"I warned you that I was going to break this, one way or another," I said grimly. "It happens that a certain grand old gent is a friend of mine and if I have to bludgeon you with publicity to make you see the light, I'll do it. The yarn could be messy, Shields. It's in your lap whether you take it the hard way."

He gave me a nasty look. "What are you talking about? I've got nothing to hide. Moore and his men have got what they deserve."

"Let it pass whether you've given them a fair shake, Shields. I'll make you a sporting proposition."

"What do you mean?"

"Since you have nothing to hide, and you're convinced that your coaching is getting the best out of the material you have, you can't lose. My proposition is simply this: play your varsty a full-game scrimmage against these men you've shunted to the doghouse. If your varsity takes 'em, that's it. I won't run a line of the story. If they take your varsity, then you agree that they will be given opportunity to show in a regular game and I'll wait and spring the stuff after the Central Tech game and make it read as though keeping them under cover was deliberate strategy on your part."

"And if I ignore such a crazy proposition?"

"Then I'll peel the hide off you as a mule-headed, petty martinet who is tossing out the window the best football material in Kalbion history!"

Red flushed beneath the fair skin of Shields' face then he whirled on Terry Moore.

"A beautiful job you've engineered," he gritted. "I'm coach of this squad and I refuse to be railroaded into any promises. But get your precious crew together and we'll show you that you don't rate more than scrubs!"

/ 3 /

THERE WAS a grimness about the White team as they lined up for the kickoff. Terry Moore looked pretty bleak himself. Person-

ally, I could think of a thousand things I'd rather be doing than refereeing this clambake. I'd been surprised that Shields agreed when Terry suggested that I officiate. I shrilled my whistle and Mazurka plunked a foot into the ball and the Whites chattered fight talk.

"Who gets the tackle! . . . Pin their ears back! . . . Smack 'em down! . . ."

Jake Holk took the kickoff and got to the eighteen before a White tackler knifed through the interference and smeared him.

"Here's where we start taking 'em apart," Pete Orr shouted. "Show 'em what *don't* make 'em tick!"

The varsity hepped into a double wing from the huddle and they poured a power drive at Mazurka's tackle. The big Polish lad was a lot of tackle, but two blockers gave him the high-low treatment and Holk rammed through the hole. He went for six yards before he was spilled.

"So we're going to be taken apart!"

"How'd it be if we showed you birds what *does* make us tick!"

The Blues came smoothly from the huddle and ran what started like another tackler smash. Then suddenly the play unwound into a reverse and the ballcarrier was around the opposite flank and into the clear before the Whites spotted him. For a moment it looked as though he was loose for an all-the-way jaunt. Terry Moore was the only man he had to beat. The black-haired guy nailed the ballcarrier on the White thirty.

"What's going on!" Pete Orr belated. "These monkeys can't do that to us!"

But the varsity ground steadily over the chalkmarks. They got a first down on the twelve. Terry called a time-out. I hung around their huddle because I was interested.

"We're disorganized," Terry said. "We underrated them and we're pressing so much we've lost our edge. Relax. Take it cool."

The White line must have relaxed or something. When time was in they smothered an off-tackle smash on the first play. Then Pete Orr broke through and hashed an attempted spinner. The Blues rolled their

power at Mazurka again. The big Polski hand-fought blockers rode with the interference and forced the ballcarrier into Tamlin's arms.

Fourth down and seven.

"Watch it, gang," Terry warned. "They may have something fancy."

The Blues tried nothing more fancy than their off-tackle standby. Mazurka and Tamlin teamed to spill Holk on the five and the Whites took possession of the ball.

"Now we go," Orr yipped. "Pin back the ears of these monkeys!"

TERRY MOORE had always been a smart play-picker. He sized up the Blues' six-two-two-one defense and saw that they were playing a loosely-spread secondary but not deep, as though they expected the Whites to unravel a pass even that deep in their own territory.

Terry called a quick opener.

The T specialty hit like a coach's dream. Jarvor carried and cracked through the slit that Orr made and Mazurka knifed across and mopped up the immediate backer-up. Jarvor cannonballed over the twenty yard stripe before they knocked him off his feet.

"Same thing again," Terry ordered in the huddle.

It went for a first down on the thirty-two. The White secondary tightened, crept in a step or two. Terry gauged the defensive pattern, sent Tamlin into the same spot on a spin buck. Tamlin made six yards. Terry took over himself, slanted off as though hitting at the tackle then cut back into the guard spot and it was another first down on the forty-three.

"We're on our way," Orr yelled. "Give us room, you coach's pets!"

Now Terry had the Blue defense set up. He uncorked the fake tackle smash and it was executed so neatly that he had me expecting another cutback when he suddenly faded and I had to scramble out of the way. Jarvor was again downfield behind the defensive halfback but this time Jarvor had company. Holk had diagnosed the play. He went up in the air with Jarvor, battled with him for

the ball. Jarvor's longer reach enabled him to rake in the pigskin, but Holk nailed Jarvor immediately. The varsity captain was fighting.

Terry mixed the White attack cannily, hit at the line then flipped passes and they worked the ball to the seven with a yard needed on fourth down. The touchdown play was a honey. Smooth.

"It'll be a lateral to the man-in-motion," Terry said in the huddle. "We've got to have this yard, Tam."

Tamlin masked his part well-enough but Holk had diagnosed the play to a T. He angled wide with Tamlin as the pass was made. He would have dropped Tamlin for no gain, or maybe a loss, except that Orr yelled for the ball and Tamlin heaved a second lateral across to Orr even as Holk's arms were around him. Pete Orr rammed all the way for the touchdown.

They might as well have called it a day right then.

The Blues took Mazurka's kickoff, couldn't get anywhere with their offense and punted. Now the Whites found the going different. Jake Holk was a one-man gang. The Blues forced Terry's team to punt and there was the pattern for the rest of the scrimmage.

I'm telling you that scrimmage was an eye-opener for me. 'Course, I was supposed to be impartial—and I called the ballgame that way—but I'd been confident at the start that Holk & Co. were in for a grid lesson. But those kids were battlers. Holk had the stuff. He could play on my team anytime.

For my money, the horn that signalled the end was a welcome sound to all of those lads. I eyed the Blue team. They were weary, but so were the Whites. This had been a rock-'em and sock-'em session as tough as any regular game.

"You know," Pete Orr said thoughtfully. "Those gents kinda force a guy to revise his opinion. They've got more on the ball than I thought."

"You can double that in no-trump," Mazurka grunted. "Pets or not, they hit plenty hard and they can take it.

But we took 'em. Shields will have to give us a break now."

I'D FIGURED the same as Mazurka. But I sat up in the press box during the opening game on Kalbion's schedule and I didn't even get the usual kick out of the colorful antics of the cheerleaders or the chanting yells from the massed students. Mort Shields absolutely ignored Terry Moore and the men who had played in that scrimmage with Terry.

Kalbion managed to squeak out a one touchdown win but Central Tech had beaten the same team the previous Saturday by three touchdowns and had played second, third, and fourth stringers the final half.

A pair of Central Tech scouts were in the pressbox a couple of seats from me. They'd found out that I was a Kalbion man and they had a lot of fun shafting barbs into me.

"You'll be lucky if we don't run your gang out of the stadium next week," one of them said. "That's naturally not for publication, but confidentially, we'll smother that alleged power attack that Shields is playing. It's liable to be no contest."

I didn't have much of a comeback. This team was supposed to provide just a nice opening game workout had pretty well throttled our stuff whenever we approached pay dirt. It was a cinch that Tech's defense would be much tougher.

I didn't write a blast in Sunday's paper. I expected to hear from Shields with some explanation. I didn't. So Monday I phoned him.

"Get this, Wheat," he said. "I told you when you tricked me into that screwy scrimmage that I was coach of my ballclub and that I wasn't being railroaded into any promises. That still goes."

He hung up. Okay, I thought, if that's the way you want it. I phoned Deab Pollett and told him that I was going to let go with both barrels. Pollett gave me the green light.

I really laid things on the line in my Tuesday column.

This correspondent witnessed a scrimmage between the so-called

Kalbion varsity and a gang of rough and tough footballers that is classed by Coach Shields as scrubs. In our book, the varsity label was plastered on the wrong squad. The men that Coach Shields calls his varsity absorbed a neat trimming in that scrimmage.

We were under the impression that Coach Shields was saving the team headed by Terry Moore as a strategic surprise for Tech. Such is not the case. If it were true, Kalbion might upset mighty Tech.

But Shields refuses to use the material at hand and we believe Kalbion supporters are entitled to know the facts. Saturday's disappointing opener clearly demonstrated that Kalbion will give no opposing teams on their schedule nightmares.

We do not pretend to be a coach but for our money, Shields is passing up a golden opportunity in not utilizing his material to the full.

RUMORS of that scrimmage between the varsity and Terry's crew had flown about the campus before the opening game. After I wrote that column I had a hunch that there would be more than rumors and I made it my business to be out there when my column hit the campus.

It was like a verbal bomb.

Groups of students in the halls, the library, everywhere on the campus, heatedly discussed the business.

"It's Moore who's at the bottom of the thing! He's after Shields' job and he doesn't care what he pulls to get what he wants!"

"Yeah, that's what a guy on the varsity told me. This sports writer gink has been played for a sucker by Moore!"

"You're goony! You don't play sports writers for suckers. They know the score and this guy's got the dope. Why doesn't Shields use those guys?"

"Aw, they're trying to run things just because they're vets and Shields

won't stand for it. I'm for Shields."

That's the kind of arguments I heard. The stir my column kicked up was bigger than I'd counted on. I suddenly got a little scared. After all, I didn't have any real business horning into a campus affair. I headed for Pollett's office.

"You did what I hoped you'd do," the Dean said. "This thing has to be brought to a head or it will fester like a boil."

But I felt sort of squirmy. I didn't go too much for this business of cats-pawing for Dean Pollett but I could see that the Dean couldn't very well do it himself. And I was in up to my neck now.

Shields didn't pay any attention to Moore and the others in a heavy Wednesday workout.

Thursday things really began heading up. The *Kalbion College Weekly Argus* always sent our desk a couple of copies and the issue that week came out with a front page editorial titled **KALBION LOYALTY** that literally screamed at me when I opened the paper. It was strictly a panning of Terry Moore and his friends without naming names.

I beat it out to Kalbion College. This was right down my alley. I remembered how awed I had been of honest-to-gosh newspapermen when I was editor of the *Argus*. I wouldn't have any trouble in selling the kid that was editor now on how wrong he was.

I got exactly no place with that kid. He might have been awed but he certainly didn't show it.

"The piece represents the view of the *Argus*," he kept saying stubbornly.

"Blast it, can't you see what a piece of guesswork like that does to your team? No newspaperman worth his salt will let his columns be used for propaganda. You can write only facts."

"I didn't write that editorial, Mr. Wheat, but I'm newspaperman enough that I checked the facts before we ran it."

"You didn't write it? Who did? Where did you get it?"

The kid just gave me a look, said "Newspapermen don't divulge their sources of information, Mr. Wheat."

That was it. I beat my brains out for half an hour but that kid was nine-tenth mule. I was convinced that whoever wrote that editorial had pulled a fast one and a nebulous theory was rattling around in my head. I was walking dejectedly across the campus when I spotted Terry Moore coming from a classroom building.

H E MET Pete Orr and they stopped a minute and a quartet of students passed them. Orr spoke to one of the four. The guy looked Orr squarely in the eye, glanced at Terry Moore and started to pass without answering Orr's greeting. Pete Orr shot out a hand and spun the guy around.

"Didn't you hear me," Orr growled. "I said, 'hi!'"

"I heard you," The student glared at Terry Moore contemptuously. "I happen to be a loyal Kalbion man, that's all. Get wise to yourself, Orr. You're liable to be judged by the company you keep!"

Orr's clenched fist was started toward a sock at the guy when Terry grabbed his arm. Terry stepped in front of Orr.

"Hold it, Pete," he said. He turned to the student. "You've said your piece, scram!"

"I'll smack these fool Joe Collegers silly!" Orr raged. "Lemme be, Terry, I'll cram it down their guts!"

"You'll keep your head," Terry said bleakly. "It's me they're after. There's no sense in the rest of you being—"

"Hi, Terry," I interrupted. "Been looking for you." I nodded to Orr. "Terry's right," I said. "All of you keep your heads. This time tomorrow the same kids that are redheaded after your scalp now will be fawning all over you."

Terry gave me a penetrating look. I forced a grin that I hoped was cockily confident. It was occurring to me to wonder just how a guy went about it to make from strictly bluffing like I was doing.

"Grant Wheat, specialist in applied

psychology," I said. "I've got things figured and I'll make Mort Shields see it. Mort shouldn't be in this coaching racket. You're mostly responsible for him being in a job that'll only bring him grief, Terry."

Terry was startled out of asking me what I had on my mind. I sort of figured on throwing him off balance so he wouldn't pin me down too close.

"I'm responsible," he ejaculated.

"How do you get that way!"

"Simple psychiatric deduction, that's all. Shields has played a subordinate role to you ever since you were Frosh." I parroted words that Dean Pollett had said to me. "You were the star ballcarrier; Shields was the blocker. You were a successful applicant for a Marine commission: Shields was rejected because of an injury he'd got blocking for you. I doubt that Shields realizes the deep seated drive to surpass you in something that made him forsake medical school to take up coaching."

TERRY'S FACE was bleak. I could practically read his thoughts. So that was it! Mort Shields had known how much he wanted this coaching job. They'd talked about it in the old days. Yeah, it was to have been Dr. Mort Shields! The so-and-so! Shields and that Holk punk made a good pair

"What's your considered opinion of Shields' football system, Terry?" I interrupted his thoughts. He shrugged.

"Double wing, single wing, the T—any system, what's the odds? When you've got the manpower, any of them look good. I never played anything but a double wing until I entered the Marines. We had a former Chicago Bear as Athletic Officer and he was sold on the T. So we played the T."

"But you believe that Kalbion's material is best fitted for the T?"

Terry frowned. "The boys that played with me in the Marines are most familiar with the T," he said. "Shields' holdovers are naturally most familiar with the double wing. I don't know. Maybe I was out of bounds in trying T stuff without Shields' positive go-ahead. He did a job last

year with the double wing."

I shook my head. "In my book, they did a job in spite of Shields. He's miscast as a coach. Kalbion needs a more adaptable man in the job."

"I'm not after his job, Grant. I'm willing to do what I can to help make a winning team. So will Pete, here, and Tam and Jary and the others. Only we're not kids anymore."

"This isn't exactly a thing to be settled by kid methods," I said. I crossed mental fingers and hoping that I could deliver, I went all the way. "Have your gang ready, Terry. Things are going to break tomorrow."

4

HAVE YOU ever worked yourself into a spot with big talk and then found you couldn't back it up? That was the kind of spot I was in that day of the Central Tech—Kalbion game. I never put in such a miserable time in my life as I did during that first half.

It was murder to sit up there in the pressbox and watch Tech inexorably grinding down a fighting but over-manned team. Dammit, Kalbion was my school. And there was manpower to burn going to waste down there on the Kalbion bench. I cursed the stupidity of Mort Shields.

I cursed out a smart gent named Grant Wheat for a meddling busy-body who had messed everything up. I'd gone to Shields that morning with everything worked out and confident that I had the tight dope. I'd made my play as earnestly as I could and it had flopped dismally.

"Okay," Shields said coldly. "So I'm a stubborn jackass. What you hand me on your say-so doesn't prove that Moore is any different than the way I've got him pegged. I don't trust him—and I don't trust his playmates."

"I do not admit that the style of play I was taught and have been coaching deserves to be junked. Your screwy theory leaves me absolutely cold. I'm coaching this ballclub and we're going to play it my way."

Well, they were playing it his way.

I've seen enough football that I knew the ten-to-zero score on the board for Tech now would be bigger before the game ended. But there I was.

Maybe you think a newspaperman can pull things out of the bag. Well, I'd had every line I could manipulate working overtime and although I was sure in my own mind, I had not a doggone thing I could offer Shields as definite proof. The pretty plan I'd had every line. I could manipulate and Holk had blown up in my face.

There was barely a minute of play left in the first half when the assistant Tech coach, up in the pressbox with a telephone to spot for their bench, left to be with his gang during halftime intermission. He was one of the guys who had needled me the week before. He stopped and grinned down at me.

"You had us worried with that blast you put in your column early in the week," he said. "But it looks as though the Old Man's scheme worked."

"Schemes?" I tried to hide the eagerness in my voice. "Don't tell me that powerful Tech stooped to shenanigans to take Kalbion!"

"Are you kidding! The Old Man was worried more over this game than any on our schedule. And if he hadn't sold one of your kids a bill of goods in order to keep Shields from using all he's got, he'da had every right to worry!"

"You're kidding! Don't give me that old melodramatic guff. None of our guys would sell out to you!"

"Who said anything about selling out? But remember, they're only kids—and the Old Man is a savvy operator. I'll tell you all about it later."

The Tech man looked surprised and a little flustered when I suddenly barged past him and took the stairs from the pressbox three at a time. I was down at the ramp where the players come off the field when Mort Shields came past. I grabbed his arm and I talked fast. He must have seen that it was more than conjecture that I had.

"—And that editorial in the *Argus* was inspired by someone not on the

regular staff. Shields, you've got to face this thing. I'm going to get Pollett."

I TOLD the Dean what I heard and Pollett sent after the *Argus* editor. That stubborn kid lost his mulishness when the Dean went to work on him. He told Pollett that the *Argus* had got the editorial from Jake Holk.

"Call in Holk, Mort," Pollett said.

Holk made no attempt to deny that he was responsible for the *Argus* editorial. When I asked him where he got the screwy idea that Terry Moore was disloyal to Kalbion, Holk clammed up. I let him have it, told him what the Tech coach had let slip to me. Holk turned green around the gills.

"I—I didn't have any intention of harming the team," he muttered.

Pollett said, "I think it's time you had Terry come in, Mort."

When Terry Moore came through the door I saw that something had happened to him, too.

"Look, Shields," he said without preamble. "What I'm going to say may sound a little on the corny side, but I mean it. I've sat out there on the bench and a thing that I'd sort of forgotten the past month hit me pretty strong. The old college still has a pull.

"It's not important whether Mort Shields shows up Terry Moore, or vice-versa. What is important is that Kalbion is taking the grief, and Kalbions bigger than either of us. There are guys out there on the bench who can do things for Kalbion. Take your starters out and give them a breather. Send Tamlin and Orr and Mazurka and the rest in there and Tech will find that they've got hold of something. It doesn't matter whether you play me. Holk is rugged enough to—"

"Hold it, Terry," Shields said. "I—I—well, I've been a double-distilled jerk. Guess that's the way to begin. Grant Wheat had me doped to a I—and that's no pun. I've been a mule-headed dope! I fell right into the smooth little trap that Tech baited for me!"

"Wait a sec, Coach." Jake Holk

eyed Terry and the stocky captain's eyes didn't waver. "It's been me more than Coach," he said. "Tech's head-coach lives in the same suburban section as we do. He and my dad belong to the same lodge and he was over to our place before practice started. I can see now that he made excuse just to feed me his line.

"He planted the idea in my head that you were out to shove me from the picture, that you were a smooth worker and that you'd eventually ease Coach out of his job, too. I may as well admit that when I learned you were coming back to Kalbion I was afraid you'd oust me."

Holk dropped his eyes momentarily then brought them back to Terry.

"I talked it over with Coach the night before he went to the conference meeting," Holk said. "It was me that stirred up a guy on the *Argus* staff to write that editorial, too. I've been a stinker."

"No more than I have," Shields said to Terry. "When your gang played my bunch better than even, I knew deep down that I was wrong, but I lacked the moral guts to admit it. Grant Wheat laid it on the line to me yesterday that Tech was behind this somehow, to weaken us by stirring up dissension. I refused to listen to him. I've been a stubborn ass."

"It hasn't been entirely one-sided," Terry said slowly. "I've been on the sad-sack side myself. I've been thinking wrong, more of how poorly used Terry Moore was and sore because you had the coaching spot."

"I take full blame for this assinine performance," Shields sighed. "But I see daylight now. Tell your gang that they will start this second half, Terry. As a team. Give those Tech guys the full treatment!"

I DIDN'T go back to the pressbox. I was plenty jittery as that second half started. That grand all-for-one spirit that had been rampant between halves could be dissipated pretty easily. But Terry Moore and his gang were a football team.

There was a lot of agitation on the Tech bench when a new team faced them at the kickoff. They had a right

to be agitated. Theyd put all their defensive eggs in one basket, built a solid defense against a double wing power game. Now all of a sudden they were faced with a tricky, lancing T attack.

Terry ran his team like a master.

They took the kickoff and they began stabbing on quick openers and slashes inside the tackles. They forced Tech's secondary to crowd in close to stop the short plunges.

Bingo!

Terry pulled the trigger on the forward-lateral and Jarvor grabbed the forward on the Tech forty, sprinted another eighteen yards before they hemmed him in, then flipped a lateral to Tamlin and Pete Orr was down there to throw a block on the safety that made it an easy path to glory for Tamlin and the successful conversion whittled the score to 10-7, Tech.

You had to give that Tech team credit, they had a ballclub. They took Mazurka's kickoff and they kept possession in a sustained drive that carried to our twelve before we could bog them. There wasn't much we could do about the field goal they kicked. It was 13-7, Tech, when the third period was nearly over.

Tech coaches poured a stream of fresh men into the game. Then Terry and his ex-Leathernecks came back with all the fight they'd had once in a bigger game. They hammered and pounded. They ground out yardage steadily. They were whipping that Tech gang. The quarter ended with us in possession of the pigskin on the Tech thirty.

Tech broke up two razzle-dazzlers to start the final period and it was third down and ten to go. Terry Moore called time and came to the bench escorted by the referee.

"Send in your gang, Mort," Terry said. "These guys are geared to our stuff now, but they'll be a soft touch for Holk and the boys." He grinned at Holk. "The captain of a team ought to be in at the kill anyway!"

JAKE HOLK looked up at Terry and his dark face lighted like you'd switched on a spot.

"You're a guy, Moore," Holk said. "Maybe you and your gang will show us how this game ought to be played."

"Zowie!" I yelled. I felt like a guy who's made a three-horse parlay stand up. I yanked off my hat and slapped Terry on the ramp. "Here comes that beautiful dream alive!"

I grinned wider. I felt great as I poked Holk in the ribs. "What a gang you're going to captain!" I chortled. I banged Mort Shields with my hat.

Suddenly then I saw Dean Pollett, eyes shining and smiling quietly.

"You know," Shields said. "I've got a hunch that a job's been done on me that I needed pretty bad. I'm cured." Kalbion's coach eyed Dean Ray Pollett. "I'm taking the advice you tried to sell me, Dean. I'm enrolling tomorrow in medical school. I'll have a lot of back work to catch up. There won't be much time for football."

It was good to see the sparkle that lighted Pollett's eyes as Terry threw an arm over Shields' shoulders.

"We can work out the coaching end," Terry said. "Together. Looks as though we've both seen a great light."

Then suddenly Terry eyed me. I knew what had hit him. Something of the same had hit me. I grinned, shook my head.

"I'd proudly accept the credit," I said. "But I'd be four-flushing to take a bow for the clever way this business has been maneuvered so that everybody emerged from behind the eight ball."

I nodded toward Dean Pollett.

"Now maybe we understand the game the Dean was playing. Maybe. He's a right smart gent, in my book. He knew that you were all sound at the core and he knew that I was just smart-dumb enough to force a payoff."

I grinned then at Pollett. "Thanks," I said, and the Dean knew that I was thanking him for bringing back to me a measure of the old campus idealism that we all carry away from college. "I'm banging that old tire wagon tonight," I said. "To celebrate a four-way payoff. It's campus payoff."

THE END



B A L M

By Sid Press

When he was young, he never saw a game.
He worked hard after school. When Sunday came
He had no money, because he always turned
Over to his father all he earned.

In summer-time he found himself a job
And so he only heard of Ruth and Cobb;
Of Speaker, Matty and of John McGraw;
But through his youth he never really saw
His Heroes. The other kids he knew
Somehow got to see a game or two
But he just had to read about it all
And dream about the crack of bat on ball.

He took his son as soon as he was grown
Old enough to know what he was shown.
They never missed the Dodgers or the Yanks.
He bought him Pop and Ice-cream cones and "Franks".
He told him only a catcher wore a mitt
And how to tell an error from a hit.

And every time his son laughed or cheered,
Another wound healed and disappeared.



Hick Dick



A
Hilarious Fight
Story

by **TOM THURSDAY**

YOU KNOW what, huh? I wouldn't be at all surprised if there isn't *millions* of guys like Cyanide Hoover, middleweight champ of the whole world, including the Bronx and Brooklyn. His full name, in round numbers, is no less than Josephus Holmes Hoover, and he got that cyanide handle from some wide awake sports writer who claims the champ socks like poison. Which same he does!

You may recall how we win the championships from Ivory Head Hogan in Madison Square Garden last year. You may likewise remember how Felony Jones, the bandit who manages Hogan, filed a protest to the boxing commish, claiming that my brat come into the ring with a Tommy gun and four bucks worth of concrete in his gloves. Mr. Jones also

claims foul, hitting in the clinches, smacking Hogan when he wasn't looking, and ten other items too humorous to mention.

But all you guys who saw the two-man Verdun know that Hoover came out in the first round and clipped Hogan on the chinola and the belly, with a one-two that must have made Hogan think he was in the dead center of the Battle of Bull Run. Some of the sports writers remark in print later that a large sum of heavy moola must have changed hands, otherwise they can't figure how Hoover bims Hogan with such speed and positive alacrity. All of which is a large load of phonus with a big beaker of bolonus. He bounced Hogan the same way Eisenhower kayoed Hitler, fair and square, what I mean.

Well, it is very soon after Hoover

becomes the middleweight title king when I note a very strange difference in his general deportment. When I picked him up two years previously, directly from driving a beer wagon, he is very enthusiastic about the high art of fisticuffing and says it is his pet ambition. He's a nice, clean living kid, kind to his mother, and even gives his father a break when the Old Man wanders in with a brewery down his gullet.

It is less than a week after we cop the crown when I get back to our suite in the Hotel Gypdorf Towers and find Cyanide Hoover in a very meditative state of mind. He is esconced on the divan, encased in the very latest of silk bathrobes, and he is completely surrounded with books on crime and how to be a detective. I take a snooker at some of the titles and I am dumb-founded with what I see. For instance, he has one tome which breaks down and says it is *Crime and Circumstantial Evidence; It's Cause and Cure*. Another is yclept—Hobeken for title—*Murder For Money; Or, Have a Hot Seat In the Chair*. The third one has the tasty title of *How To Be a Private Detective; Or, Why Stay Poor?* And for light reading he has *Crack Detective Stories and Confidential Detective Cases*.

But the payoff is the book I find him reading when I come in. He's plowing throught the tenth chapter of a mess named *The Whole English Language; Or, Grammar For The Mob*. What do you think of that for a plate of patootie?

"Nice day," I say. I get no reply from the student on the divan. "I see where Felony Jones is demanding a return match with Hogan, to take place in the Orange Bowl next January in Miami, Florida."

Before replying, he lets got with a yawn and a polite hiccup. "Please," he says, "I do not desire to be disturbed. I am now on my study period. You may converse with me at 12 o'clock, which is one hour from now."

I go over and feel his brow, expecting to find it as hot as a three-

alarm fire. He lowers his book and says, "Have I not suggested that I do not desire to be disturbed? Please!"

"Look, sap," I snort, "remember me? I'm the mug who made you the champ of the middleweight division. You will kindly lower that highbrow stuff and be yourself!"

HE PUTS down the trick book and gets off the divan. "You will please listen to me, now," he begins. "We may well understand each other now as well as later. First, I want you to know that I do not desire to be a mere prize fighter. My real ambition has always been to be a great detective. Did you ever hear of Sherlock Holmes?"

"No," I say; "he must of been before my time. What division was he fighting in?"

He gives me a look like Al Einstein addressing a kindergarten on the theory of relatives. "For your information," he goes on, "Sherlock Holmes was a very great private detective. And you will note that my middle name is the same as his. In fact," he says, "I was named after him."

"Really?" I say, with ten bucks worth of sarcasm.

"Yes, really. And have you not heard of J. Edgar Hoover, the great leader of the Federal Bureau of Investigation?"

"I have," I admit, "but I do not desire to have him center his attention on me."

"My last name is Hoover and I have no doubt that I belong to the same family," he says. "Meantime, you will please take a walk around the block. And while you are walking you might step into the Public Library at 42nd street and Fifth avenue. They have books in there, not beer."

This sizzles me to a crisp because I am a great admirer of books, especially when they are in places where you can place a little bet on the horses. I slam my hat on my skull and blow out steaming mad. As I pass the desk clerk, the guy calls, "Oh, a new load of books have arrived for Mr. Hoover. Shall I send them up?"

"No," I snorts, "send them to under-privileged Fiji islanders!"

I duck into what they coyly call the Automat, where you insert a yard of nickels in slots and get back a foot of food. I am about to finish off a very good cup of hot chocolate when who comes in but Felony Jones, manager of the ex-champ, Ivory Head Hogan.

"Well, well, well!" he begins. "How does it, now, feel to manage a jerk champ?"

"I see that the parole board is not as strict as it used to be," I say. "How come you stray so far away from Sing Sing, hey?"

Felony grins and takes a seat right next to me, spoiling the rest of my meal by his mere presence.

"You know that Cyanide Hoover couldn't lick Hogan, even if he had General MacArthur in his corner. If you was a good sport, instead of a bum one you would give me a return match."

"Look," I smile. "Why can't you and me be pals?"

Felony blinks and almost falls off the chair on his ear.

"You kidding?" he says. "If you ain't why, I will prove to be the best palsyw-alsy you ever had. Put 'er there, bub!"

We shake. And his mitt feels like a dead eel, after same had been lying in the sun for two weeks.

"I AM ABOUT to haul off and make a confession," I say. "I hate to admit it but I think Hogan got a bum break in his brawl with Cyanide Hoover. And you are justly entitled to a return match."

"I always tells everybody that you are a swell sport," says Felony. "Okay; where do we go from here?"

"Listen," I say. "I am getting up to the top tonsils with that brat of mine. You know what? He has got the idea that he is a great detective and has practically lost all interest in the fine art of assault and battery."

"You mean Hoover wants to be a cop?"

"Not only that, but the egg-head is right this minute surrounded by 63 pounds of books on crime and how to

cure it. Likewise his langwidge is getting the wee morsel fancy and Park Avenue, with a slight touch of Harvard. He's trying to put a yard of knowledge in a inch of brain. The dope!"

"Now," I say, "I understand that you would like Hoover to battle Hogan next January in the Orange Bowl in Miami."

"That is very correct," says Felony. "The gate should be at least fifty grand, what with all the tourists and others suckers in the neighborhood."

"I appreciate that very much, indeed," I say. "I have personally always admired you and I am very happy to be your friend. All I got to do now is convince that super-cop of mine that Miami is the place for him. However, I have a idea that will win him over. If I can't, I will knock his brains out with his own books. Good afternoon, sir."

"A good afternoon to you," says Felony and we part.

I find Hoover sitting up in the plush easy chair with a book in his lap. He is concentrating deeply on some yooey entitled *You Can Be a Finger-print Expert In Two Weeks*.

"Look," I say, "I have something of the greatest of interest for you. I've been thinking things over and I have decided that you are doing the right thing studying to be a detective. In fact," I say, "I am going to help you."

"How?" he wants to know. His head is a very peculiar shape.

"How would you like to meet and work with one of the greatest detectives and criminologists on earth?"

"Why, that would be great. How come you know such a person? You meet him in the jail somewheres?"

"Leave us not be funny," I say.

"Now, this great detective is a guy I met in Miami three years ago when I was down there on a fishing trip."

"Swell," he says. "When can we go to Miami?"

"Just as soon as you agree to give Ivory Head Hogan a return bout," I say. "It will be held in the Orange Bowl and will just take a few minutes of your valuable time."

"H'mm," he sniffs. "I knew there was a hook to it. Why do I have to

HICK DICK

beat that crude person again?"

"No reason except we can use a little money. Don't forget the income tax gents nearly kayoed your bank-roll and, besides, you can use some extra money to buy books, can't you?"

"Okay," he says. "We go to Miami. But, don't forget, if you can't fix me up with Captain Barker I don't fight Hogan; see?"

THAT same night I send Captain Barker a long telegram, explaining the set-up. The captain wires right back:

Sounds interesting—bring the chump right down—now working on interesting case.

"What does he mean, *chump*?" demands Cyanide.

"He wrote *champ*, not *chump*," I explain. "The dumb telegraph operator put in a 'U', instead of an 'A'."

That was a tight squeeze, but I get away with it.

Two mornings later we are state-roomed on the Silver Meteor Streamliner, me with sixteen different racing sheets, while the champ is smothered with thirty-four detective books.

Once we go back to the observation car and find a crap game in full bloom. One little guy, who is no doubt a jockey, makes ten straight passes and is not yet through when we arrive.

Hoover whispers to me, "Them dice are phonies. Watch me!"

He taps the little guy on the back. "I desire to see them dice," he says.

"What's eatin' you?" demands the shooter. "You are gonna spoil my luck."

The champ examines the rolling sucker-smackers, then gives them a test roll on the floor. They stop at boxcars, Yale for Big Twelve.

"O.K.," says the detective ace, "you may continue."

One of the four guys shooting, who looks a cross between Jack Dempsey and Boris Karloff, gets off his knees and glares at the champ.

"Big Shot," he snorts, "you can give us all a quick apology. Come on flathead—I says give!"

Hoover looks up at the giant torso before him and calmly scratches his head. Then he proceeds to give. One

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SPORTS FICTION

gift is a right to the chin and the other is a left to the belly. Big Boy falls backward onto the dice and they roll down the car. When they stop they face-up with Eleven.

"Leave us depart," says Cyanide.

"Look," I say, "how much did you get for that fight? I did not see any gate receipts."

"You are too commercial," he retorts. "That is the cause of most all crime. Somebody wants something that another guy has. Only he don't want to work for it. Besides, it is a pleasure to knock over big bullies. It is the only thing they understand. There is nothing greater than a swift sock in the snoot for making monkeys think."

"It's a nice day," I say, and drop the subject.

That night Hoover gets about three hours sleep, sitting up most of the time plowing through his detective books. When we reach Jacksonville, I buy a copy of the *Miami Herald* and learn what Captain Barker means when he says they are working on a interesting case. It seems some safe-cracker has got the cops dizzy, what with smacking over one safe after another, and being too modest to leave any finger-prints. In fact, this baby appears to know his business, not once does he have to resort to nitro to blow the safes open. He is likewise very neat and tidy, cleaning up any little mess he happens to make around the floor.

He also knows something about dial-diddling, as every safe cracked to date has been opened properly, like a true gent, by using the combination, which same he seems to figure out with no trouble at all. Of course they are all pretty old safes, but the little lad treats them all very neat and gentle.

The guy also appears to be on a time schedule, cracking one a night or seven a week. Sundays he usually cracks the biggest ones. You get the idea from reading the paper that the fellow is in a safe-crackers contest, and is after the first prize, which is probably a new set of burglar tools.

HICK DICK

I SHOW THE paper to Cyanide Hoover and he reads it and gives same a very superior sniff.

"This guy is just lucky," he says. "Cops can't be all over at the same time. The more safes he cracks the more he will want to crack. In the end he will win himself a free room at the state pen. Cops always have the last laugh, and don't ever kid yourself differently!"

Well, we finally reach Miami and Captain Jim Barker and two squad cars full of detectives are on hand to give the champ a royal welcome.

"So," grins Barker, "this is the man who would rather be a great detective than a champion. Well, well, well!"

"Any dope can be a pugelist," says the champ. "Besides, you are a champ one day, and a bum the next. When the roar of the crowd dies down, you go down with it. Er, where is headquarters?"

We all ride to the cop station, and go up one flight of stairs to the bureau of criminal identification. Hoover gets a look at the works the bad boys and girls have to go through and he becomes very enthusiastic.

"Swell!" he says. "This is very swell!" He takes off his coat and begins to look through some of the mug files, meaning pictures of boys and girls who thought crime paid.

"You arrived just in time, champ," says Captain Barker. "We have been having a bad time with some smart safe-cracker. He never leaves any prints and he pulls all his jobs between the hours of midnight and 2 A.M."

"I heard about that guy," says Hoover. "I am going to get after that bum tonight. Just let me ride around in one of your squad cars."

"Sure," says the captain. He gives me the very large wink. I can see he is getting a big kickola out of the champ.

Finally, the captain drives us to our hotel and the champ spends his time telling me how he is going to nail the safe-cracker. The captain wishes him luck and goes back to headquarters.

(Continued On Page 78)

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SPORTS FICTION

(Continued From Page 77)

"Just a moment, please," I say. "I am very happy, indeed, to know you are going to help the police catch that safe guy, but you are also down here to catch a guy named Ivory Head Hogan. The fight is less than four weeks away. A little training will do no harm."

"I do not desire to do no heavy training for Hogan," says the champ. "He is not so good, in my opinion. New, about this safe-cracker—"

I WALK OUT, leaving him talking to himself. I head for Flagler street, Miami's main stem, and who do I run into but Felony Jones. This is a very big surprise as I thought Felony would not be down for another week.

"How'd you get here so quick—fly down on the back of a eagle?" I ask.

"Me, I always take the very best—ah—transportation," says Felony. "I flew down in seven hours. Trains make me dizzy. They are too slow."

"Well, me and the champ have just had a nice visit to police headquarters."

"Nobody," snorts Felony Jones, "ever has a nice visit to police headquarters. I do not like cops. They are too stubborn and will not listen to reason. Now—ah—about the fight. Would you like to make a little side bet, just between us palsy-walsys, on Hoover Vs. Hogan?"

"Look," I say, "if I bet you anything, even a dried herring against a stuffed alligator, you will have Hogan enter the ring with arsenic in one hand and an atomic bomb in the other. Let this fight be on the level."

"Very well," says Felony. "How so ever, you are a terrible sucker not to make Hoover drop this one to Hogan. Then we can get a re-match back in the Garden next winter. Why don't you play smart?"

"Not interested," I say. "My champ is going to fight on the level. Er, have you been over to Miami Beach and took a gander at the blue-green ocean yet?"

"Water?" echoes Felony. "P'tooey! Anything that looks like water never

HICK DICK

has no interest for me. How about having a little snort of Old Ironsides?"

"You may buy me a ice cream soda, with whipped cream and some fresh strawberries on same," I say.

"I bid you good day, sissy," he snorts, and blows down the street.

That night me and Hoover rough-ride around in a squad car. The boys let Hoover talk into the two-way radio and the lad is having a picnic. All we answer, however, is calls on a flock of drunks, family quarrels, and small items like that. Even the one-a-day safe-cracker has laid off. When Hoover learns this he says, "I guess that bum heard I am in town."

And he actually believes it!

Next afternoon I take the champ over to the Beach and see if I can get him to do a little training. He gets in a new bright red pair of bathing trunks but all he does is walk up and down the Beach and scan all the bathers. He sees one fat guy lying on the sands with a tattoo of a battle-ship on his left arm.

"I think that bird is wanted for murder, back in Nebraska, says the champ. "I read about him in the *Police News*."

Before I can stop him he walks over and taps the gent on the back.

"I'm a police officer," says Hoover. "What's your name?"

"Pat Markowitz," says the roly-poly lad. "and you can tell my wife I ain't paying her another damned cent of alimony. She can send all the cops in the world after me!"

"You ever been in Nebraska?" asks the champ.

"What would I be doing in Nebraska?" whinnies fatty. "I'm from Brooklyn. Say, how'd the Dodgers make out today; huh?"

The champ turns to me, and remarks, "This ain't the guy I want."

THREE NIGHTS later, whilst we are riding in the squad car, we get a call to go to a trap known as the Art and Culture Cafe. This is a low beer-and-wine dive. When we arrive we find the second Battle of the Bulge in full bloom. One big guy, who

(Continued On Page 80)

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SPORTS FICTION

(Continued From Page 79)

seems to have the situation well in hand, especially in fists, is laying the other boys in the sawdust.

The two cops go in and try to make the big ape listen to reason. The ape does not care to listen to anything especially cops.

"You dumb cops ain't buttin' in; see?" he snarls. "I ain't got no more use for cops that I got fer coffins; see?" He shoots out a right and socks one of the cops on the forehead. The champ stands and looks on in amazement. The cop does not hit back; just tries to hold his arms.

"How much of this stuff have you boys gotta take?" asks the champ to the other cop.

"Oh, plenty," says the lad. "We are not supposed to hit our prisoners. It means suspension, if we do."

"Huh!" whistles Hoover. "One side, please; they can't suspend me. I ain't no cop—yet!"

He walks in, pushes the cop aside, and then sends in a haymaker to the big bum's kisser. The lad blinks in assorted amazement, and flops up against a cuspidor. Next, the champ grabs him by the heels and drags him to the squad car.

Later, at headquarters, standing against the captain's desk, where new prisoners are booked, Hoover says to Inspector Nelson, "I desire to charge this crude person with assaulting and battering a duly authorized police officer!"

Several cops and a couple of brass hats are around at the time and the charge is so unusual that they let forth with a cheer.

"Well," remarks the inspector, "this is the first time such a thing has happened since I've been on the department, and that was 28 years ago."

"It is gonna happen often, while I'm around," says the champ. "I do not see how cops stand the abuse from these bums. Now, when I become a regular member of the force I will show you something!"

"You expect to join us?" asked Inspector Nelson.

"Positively," says the champ. "I am gonna take the civil service exams

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SPORTS FICTION

(Continued From Page 80)

next week."

From then on Cyanide Hoover became the hero and patron saint of every cop on the force!

In the meantime, the *News* and *Herald* sports writers have a Roman, Greek and even Georgia holiday over the champ. One writer dubs him the "Hick Dick," and the name sticks like a blonde around grandpa with a loose bankroll. The newspaper boys get a great kick out of the fact that a boxer, and a champ, at that, is more interested in crime and detective work than in his profession. And the public lap it up like a yegg in a bank vault.

Exactly one week after we hit Miami the one-safe-a-day crackman starts working again. This time he relieves the safe of a large grocery store in the southwest section of town and the amount of moola taken is an even two grand, Oxford for two thousand buckaroos. This news irks the champ very much, indeed, and he knits a brow in seething rage. But when the guy leaves a note beside the open safe, paying compliments to Hoover, the champ looks around for more nails to bite. The note says, "My best regards to the Hick Dick."

"That bum is practically in jail," snorts Hoover. "Nobody can kid me and get away with it!"

NOTHING IS heard from the crackman for another week and I can see that the champ is getting a little bored with riding around in squad cars. I suggest a night off and tell him there is fine fishing on the County Causeway, which crosses Biscayne bay to Miami Beach. So about midnight we leave the hotel and try our luck, complete with enough fishing tackle to catch a large aquarium.

We start fishing next to an old lady who is pulling up one red snapper after the other, whilst me and the champ can't get nothing but mosquito bites. So we decide to move down to the other end and his time we park next to a guy with a large straw hat who has just caught a baby shark.

The champ walks over to observe the shark and trips over the guy's

(Continued On Page 84)

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SPORTS FICTION

(Continued From Page 82)

fishing tackle box. It is quite dark and the contents spray all over the walk. The champ turns on his big new spotlight and what he sees makes him whistle.

Scattered over the place is the finest set of burglar's equipment in the country!

For a moment the champ stands dumbfounded, then he turns to the fisherman, and snaps, "Hey, you! What about this stuff?"

"What are you talking about?" sends back the lad. "Them's tools I use fixing cars. I'm an auto mechanic by trade."

"You wouldn't be fixing safes, instead, would you?" demands Hoover.

Without replying, the fisherman jumps over the rail into the bay!

"I knew that was the guy!" bellers the champ. He takes off his hat and leaps over the rail after him. I hear a second splash and then I recall that the middleweight champ of the world can't swim from one end of a gold-fish bowl to another! I can see the end of the Hoover-Hogan fight in less than a flash. I can also see Felony Jones blowing his brains out, or a facsimile of same.

I yell over the rail, "Come back, you dope; you can't swim!" That is silly because the champ is already in the water. I don't know how deep the water is, whether two feet or two miles. I hope the police department will give the champ a neat funeral. Then I happen to think of all the money I will get for the Hoover-Hogan fight. So I take off my hat and coat and jump into the bay, hoping the champ is still alive.

There is a guggling and a splashing at the left and I swim over. It is the champ. He is dog-paddling and keeping afloat.

"He got away!" says the champ. "He got away!" I grab him by the neck and haul him to shore, which is only about fifty yards. I am practically dead from exhaustion and lay on the sand trying to catch my breath.

"I can't see him or hear him," says the champ. "He got away!"

"Shut up," I say. "Lucky both of us ain't a treat for the undertaker!"

HICK DICK

THE PAPERS get the story and they give Hero Hoover a big front page play. This adds to the publicity for the Hoover-Hogan fight and even Felony Jones is delighted. I meet him that afternoon in a bookie joint, where I have just gone to—ah—play a game of checkers.

"Look," says Jones, "This town is full of sharp-shootin' gamblers. If you get Hoover to throw the fight to Hogan, I can get you at least ten grand. I will also give you half of Hogan's take. Why be dumb, or was you born that way?"

"The fight's going to be on the up-and-up," I say. "Good day, Mr. Jones."

Two weeks pass. And not once does the safe-cracker do his stuff.

"That mug is scared stiff," says the champ. "He's all washed up!"

The very next night two safes are busted open. Beside each, a love note is found, viz., "Tell the Hick Dick to take swimming lessons."

This makes the champ so mad he can't even sputter.

Captain Barker calls me to one side and says, "That safeman is a sucker for hanging around Miami. He's a dead duck. But his act was clever. I got a line on him, thanks to the champ."

"What d'yer mean, clever?" I ask.

"He used to make out he was a plain tourist, and fish off the Causeway every night. He'd pass the patrolman on Biscayne boulevard and show him how many fish he would catch. Then he would toss his fish away and do his safe-cracking act. He'd keep his tools in his tackle box. It was a new trick and highly original."

NOW COMES the Hoover-Hogan waltz. The Orange Bowl is packed and the ticket speculators are having a boom—until the cops sloughed 'em. It ain't considered nice in Miami to black market tickets.

All the prelims are hot and exciting. In the semi-final, a guy named Cracker-Smoot knocks his playmate through the ropes onto the press box. The playmate does not return to the world for ten minutes.

(Continued On Page 86)

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SPORTS FICTION

(Continued From Page 85)

Hogan is the first to enter the ring
 in our melees. He gets a big hand and
 no razzing. Then Cyanide Hoover
 comes down the aisle. Boy, does he
 get ribbed. "Hey, Sherlock!" belches
 one smart smick, "where's Doc Wat-
 son?"

"When are you gonna catch that
 safe-cracker?" woofs another ape.

"Don't be silly," remarks another
 large intellect. "I bet he's in partner-
 ship with him!"

The bell!

Hoover comes out listlessly. I can
 see his mind is not on the fight. Ho-
 gan dances around the champ full of
 vim and large gobs of vigor. I can
 see he's in the pink. The only train-
 ing Hoover does is riding around in
 police squad cars.

Hogan lets go a sudden right and
 nails Hoover on the jaw. This gives
 the champ the idea that he is now in
 the ring and not chasing safe-crack-
 ers. He comes back with a light left
 to the head and an equally tame right
 to the button.

"Stop that romance!" yells some
 guy in the cheap seats. "I'm in no
 mood for love!"

They begin to mix it. Hoover clips
 Hogan twice with his deadly one-
 two, but nothing happens. There is no
 sting to it. Hogan lands an upper-
 cut. They are in a fond embrace when
 the bell rings.

"Wake up," I say to Hoover. "If
 you ain't asleep, you're dead!"

"I got something on my mind," he
 says. "This fight bores me."

The gong and the second round.

Hogan walks out and clips the
 champ a honey of a right uppercut.
 The great detective hits the canvas.
 He rolls over. Felony Jones nearly
 dies of a heart attack. The count goes
 to 6. Hoover rolls over and looks over
 the ropes into the ringside. He leaps
 up speedy. Hogan dashes after him.

"Wait a minute!" yells the champ.
 "I'll be right back!"

He jumps over the ropes into the
 ringside seats. Then he goes after a
 slim guy in the third row, wearing a
 Panama hat. The guy starts to run.

The champs clips him on the chin.
 The guy falls flat, out frigid.

HICK DICK

"Come back here and fight!" yells the referee. "Or I give the title to Hogan!"

Hoover grabs the guy by the collar and starts dragging him down the aisle. Halfway down, he turns and yells to the referee "Hogan can have the fight, I'm busy!"

I race to the dressing-room downstairs. The place is lousy with cops.

"Take this punk to headquarters," the champ is saying. "I never forget a face. He's the same guy who jumps over the rail into the bay. I told you I'd get him!"

Felony Jones rushes in. His head is aching from the shock of winning the championship.

"Jeeze," he moans, "if I only had known this was gonna happen. I coulda cleaned up a million. A million!"

Well, that's all, pals. All except that today Cyanide Hoover is now a full-fledged member of the police department, known as Detective Joseph Holmes Hoover. He's doing all right!

And how are you doing?

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Dope From The Dugout

By Wilcey Earle

HE SAID A MOUTHFUL

Joey Kaufman, former lightweight champion of New York State by virtue of two slashing victories over Luis Vicintini, the South American flash, was talking about amateur boxers in his beautiful Bamboo Cafe in Pa Knickerbocker's Towne a short time ago.

Joey, commenting on the spreading evil of amateur fisticuffs who were supposed to fight for the fun of it, being paid off in the dark in cash, sarcastically noted. "They're not amateurs, they're shamateurs!"

"I guess," continued Joey, "the only difference between the amateurs and the professionals today, is that the professionals are paid by check."

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SPORTS FICTION

(Continued From Page 88)

IT'S A ROUGH GAME

One of the greatest body-checkers of all time in hockey was Lionel Hitchman. Hitchman played for Boston about a tenth of a century ago. To this day, he's considered the greatest body-checker in the history of the game.

One night, Boston played the Rangers. Butch Keeling, the Rangers' flashy 195-lb., 6-foot forward, got the puck. He was "Gone With The Wind" for the Boston goal Hitchman stopped him cold with a tremendous check into the boards.

A few minutes later, Butch again had possession of the puck. This time, Hitchman must have thought the box seats were a hat-rack, because he checked Keeling there.

Picking up his arms and legs one at a time, that is, those that were still attached to his torso, Butch gritted his teeth, smiled and then growled. "I'll get past that so-and-so yet."

In the last period, the puck was passed to Butch. Skating down hell-bent for leather, Butch roared. "Watch out, Hitchman, I'm coming your way!"

Hitchman yelled back. "I'm ready Toots!"

Yesiree, you guessed it this time, the Boston Bully Boy hit Keeling so hard that poor Butch was knocked semi-conscious. He started to crawl toward the Rangers' bench. At that moment, Frank Boucher and Bill and Bun Cook skipped jauntily onto the ice as replacements.

Boucher, with a twinkle in his eye, lifted the prostrate Keeling up and slyly soothed. "Attaboy, Butch, you certainly taught that roughneck Hitchman a lesson tonight!"

JUST A MATTER OF TASTE

We don't know why it is, but we always seem to be present when the craziest things happen!

Not so long ago, after a fight in Madison Square Garden, Don Dunphy, Mel Allen, Jim Jennings, of the New York Daily Mirror, and Yours

DOPE FROM THE DUGOUT

Truly, repaired to a nearby beeratorium for a few spots of the amber fluid that cheers.

We were discussing the fight when two gents, who were as steady on their pins as a guy who had just been tagged flush on the jaw by a Joe Louis punch, plopped themselves down into a pair of empty seats at our right.

One of them ordered a beer. As soon as it was served, he spilled the beer out, ate the top of the glass and threw the stem away.

His pal, looking on, said nothing.

Three times this happened, while Dunphy, Allen, Jennings and Earle looked on in pop-eyed amazement.

Finally, the glass-eater turned to his chum and said, "I'll bet you think I'm crazy."

"Of course you're crazy," snarled the chum. "What the hell are you throwing the stem away for? That's the best part!"

'T WAS NICE OF SHANTY

John McGraw, The Little Napoleon, late leader of the New York Giants, was a hard taskmaster. As disciplinarians go, he was probably the toughest in all baseball.

Let a player under his wing step a wee bit out of line and he was promptly plastered with a fine.

"Shanty" Hogan, the big, good-natured backstop of the Giants, who liked the frivolous side of life as an antidote to the grind of playing the national pastime every day, sent McGraw's blood pressure to the boiling point more often than any other player The Little Napoleon managed.

Shortly after his latest embroglio with McGraw, Hogan was sitting in the lobby of a hotel in Cincinnati. An old friend whom he hadn't seen in years suddenly patted him on the back and cried, "Shanty, you old son-of-a-gun! It's certainly good to see you. Meet the wife. We were married two days ago."

"Pleased to meet you," responded Hogan, "by the way, are you a baseball fan?"

"I certainly am," she replied. "I

(Continued On Page 92)

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SPORTS FICTION

(Continued From Page 90)

see where McGraw fined you again after today's game. Tell me, how much money has he fined you during your career?"

Biting off a chunk of his cigar, and with the twinkle of a smile playing around his lips, Shanty sighed, "Lady, do you know that beautiful house that McGraw owns in Pelham? —Well! I bought it!"

A NAME IS BORN

We've often wondered how the tag, "Dem Bums," ever came to be foisted on the Dodgers. It took Don Dunphy, the ace sportscaster of the Mutual Network, to enlighten us.

"Back in 1934," Don informed, "the Dodgers were managed by Casey Stengel. Boom Boom Beck was in the box, while Hack Wilson played centerfield for the Stengelman. The Pirates, who were the opposition, whistled line drives safely to all parts of Ebbets Field.

Stengel, reluctant to take Beck out because of a shortage of hurlers due to injuries, could stand it no longer. He walked out on the mound and motioned Beck to the showers. Beck refused to go saying he was a cinch to strike out the next batter.

Stengel became infuriated at Beck's refusal to leave. He worked himself up to a lather and again ordered Beck to scram. This time, he punctuated the order by furiously throwing his cap on the ground.

Beck, seeing the jig was up, and being just as angry as Stengel, hurled glove to the earth, whirled completely around in the direction of the outfield, and he threw the ball way over Wilson's head in centerfield.

Hack, who was day-dreaming, quickly turned around and charged after the pellet like a mad bull. He tripped twice in his quest of the ball, but finally retrieved it and threw a perfect strike to home plate.

The fans were in an uproar. Never had they seen a sight as funny as this on a ball field. One diehard Brooklyn fan with a tremendously loud voice, however, couldn't stand it. He disgustingly bellowed several

(Continued On Page 94)

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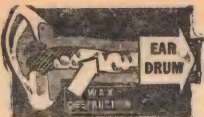
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SPORTS FICTION

(Continued From Page 92)

times. "Why, dem bums; why dems bums!"

The stands quickly took up the chant, the nation's sports announcers and sports scribes commented on it, and the name that will live as long as the Brooklyn Dodgers have a baseball club, was born.

WE SURE CAN THROW IT

When we brought Tony Canzone-ri along backstage to the Columbia Broadcasting Theatre to see Fred Allen's sparkling program some time ago, he and Fred became deeply engaged in a boxing discussion, with the accent on science.

Fred, a former boxer himself, and a pretty good one, too, opined as to how the skill exhibited by a great boxer is a science, just as is the skill of a great surgeon. Tony nodded silent assent.

Assembled together, we thought, was a pretty good conglomeration of world's champions—a world's champion fighter, a world's champion comedian—and a world's champion bull-thrower!

ARE YOU SMART

How much do you really know about baseball? Are you well versed in the intricacies of the sport, or do you just have a superficial idea of what's going on?

Now, some fans feel that because they know what a double play, a squeeze play and fielder's choice are, they are veritable master minds when it comes to behind-the-scenes baseball. Are you in this class? If you are, let's see you solve the following problem:

What kind of a ball does a major league pitcher throw to the batter when the bases are full and he knows the squeeze play is on?

No, it isn't a curve or a drop or a low or high inside or outside pitch. Give up? All right, we thought you would. He throws a duster—and for this reason; the man at the plate will invariably draw his head back to avoid being conked; the backstop catches the ball, and nine times out of ten, the man at third who is off with a pitcher's wind-up, is a dead pigeon between third and home.

That's inside baseball!

BATS FOR BRAINS

(Continued From Page 89)

"Maybe," Rip muttered. Jane wasn't, of course; for a moment, he'd thought Bud had meant Mary Ellen. "Jane's not a fan, though," he said.

And, at that there wasn't much more you could say about Jane. She'd rather see the check than the game, and that was that. *Money's anonymous*, he thought—it doesn't care what it pays for. Pay-checks began to wheel about him in the humid air, and what was happening on the field seemed to recede. Just pay-checks. They all bore his name, and the name of a bank—but there wasn't anything on them to show what they were for. They were just—money.

"Thanks, Bud," Rip heard himself chortling, as he slapped the short-stop's shoulder.

Bud goggled. "B-b-b-but I meant Mary Ellen," he said in pained surprise.

"So do I," replied Rip.

The fans didn't like seeing him climb back on that mound as the bottom of the second opened, but no crowd ever shouted Ken Timmins down. As for Rip, he'd given up nursing the soup-bone, and he wasn't listening. The game was off the ice now. He remembered Bud saying how slick that duster-play had been and wondered how slick he could be now when all he cared about was winning.

He struck the first pair of Trojans one-two-three and the next man tipped the ball back into Mickey's glove. That changed the kind of noises that came from the stands. They thought he was lucky; but just the same some of the edge was gone from their jeers.

When he came to bat Horton didn't give him much, but he got a piece of what there was and made second when the Trojan pitcher tossed it wild. Mickey sacrificed him home and with the score tied, Rip felt better; now there was a chance to make up for a bad start.

It was when Horton came to bat again that Rip felt destiny looking at him. Horton was a pitcher and knew what to look for. But he looked in all the wrong places. Rip's arm

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SPORTS FICTION

made the ball do everything but travel in spirals; Horton's third cut at the horsehide was, for the first time, an angry one, and he fouled out. It was the last time that game that Trojan hickory even touched the ball; the H...ets made a marathon of it.

The last game; he knew it would be forgotten, and so would he. It wasn't a no-hitter. Rip had never pitched one. No-hitters come seldom, but a good game was rare enough; and he'd given the stands a good game. They were still shouting 'R. I. P! R. I. P!' but it was a hysterical locomotive yell by the time he left the field.

It was a good exit line for his ruined arm, but Mary Ellen gave him a better. "I knew it," she crowed after the last kiss.

Rip chuckled. "Damned if I did."

THE END

FROM SIDELINE TO GOAL-LINE

(Continued From Page 30)

ing moment. Sadness struck through him. It was his last game. Never again the glory road for him. Then he looked down at those teammates around him as they headed for the ramp.

"Watch us tear those Cornell monkeys apart next week!" Monk Stern was saying. "We'll take 'em apart!"

And Hig Barron felt good again. He'd done his job, set them on fire. They'd be all right without him next week....

THE END



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